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THE  
ORIGINAL  
OF THE  
*MINIATURE.*



A NOVEL.

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Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

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THE  
ORIGINAL  
OF THE  
**MINIATURE.**

A Novel.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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By SELFNA DAVENPORT,

AUTHOR OF *THE HYPOCRITE, OR MODERN JANUS, THE SONS OF  
THE VISCOUNT AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARL, DONALD  
MONTEITH, &c. &c.*

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“ Too faithful heart! thou never canst relieve  
Thy wither'd hopes: conceal the cruel pain;  
O'er thy lost treasure still in silence grieve,  
But never to the unfeeling ear complain:  
From fruitless struggles dearly bought refrain;  
Submit at once—the bitter task resign,  
Nor watch and fan th'expiring flame in vain.”

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VOL. I.

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London:

*Printed at the Minerva Press for*

**A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.**

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1816.



THE  
**Original of the Miniature.**

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CHAPTER I.

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“England, with all thy faults I love thee still—  
My country! Though thy clime  
Be fickle, and thy year most part deform’d  
With dripping rains, or wither’d by a frost,  
I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies,  
And fields without a flower, for warmer Inde,  
Of golden fruitage, and her fragrant bowers.”

SUCH was the exclamation of Arthur Herbert, as he stood gazing on a group of cottage children who were returning with their parents from the toils of the day. It was harvest-time, and the season more than commonly productive. Health and hap-

piness beamed on each sunburnt countenance, as they gaily carolled one of their provincial songs, in which each infant voice occasionally joined, and added to the peaceful pleasure of the scene.

Herbert threw some silver among them. With honest gratitude they thanked and blessed him. Theirs was the language of nature, and it spoke to the soul of one whose real feelings, accustomed as he was from childhood to all the pomp and parade of Eastern splendour, still accorded best with the unrestrained freedom of his native isle. A glow of national pride tinged his cheek, as he contrasted in his own mind the blessings of England with those of other nations.

Herbert quitted it when only seven years old, and, with his sister, who was much younger than himself, accompanied their father to India, on his being appointed to a situation of considerable importance in that country. Their own mother was dead; but her place was amply filled  
by

by a lady of exquisite beauty and accomplishments, who became the wife of Mr. Herbert before he left England, and to whom Arthur had attached himself so firmly, that he seemed to live only in her presence. This affection was as warmly returned by Mrs. Herbert, who, when his father proposed sending him to England for the purpose of education, entreated so earnestly that she might not be deprived of her boy, that he, by whom her wishes were ever held sacred, immediately commissioned a friend in England to seek out a proper person as tutor to his son, with the offer of a liberal salary, as a compensation for his temporary banishment from his family and home.

His little daughter required no other instruction than what she received from Mrs. Herbert, who was admirably calculated to render her all that her fond father desired, had not the perversity of her own nature, and the envious jealousy of her disposition,

counteracted the tender and excellent precepts of her mother. Notwithstanding these unhappy defects in the character of Dorinda Herbert, she was not wholly destitute of good qualities. She idolized her father, and, next to him, the woman whom he prized above all earthly beings, and to whose unremitting attention and maternal affection she was herself indebted for every happiness she enjoyed. Yet this very tenderness too frequently betrayed the littleness of her soul, and called into action her grand failing. She could not bear to listen to the praises bestowed by her parents on some of her young associates; the instant any of them became distinguished by their caresses, Dorinda disliked them, and even at moments felt jealous of the watchful solicitude, the never-failing love, with which her brother was viewed by Mrs. Herbert. This unfortunate perversity made her espouse the cause of those whom her parents could only treat with mere civility,

and

and the object of her brother's dislike was sure of meeting with a warm advocate in Dorinda.

Plain in her person, she, nevertheless, early became the magnet of general attraction. Her father's high situation in India, his wealth, but, above all, the sweet and polished manners of his wife, joined to his own fascinating powers of conversation and deportment, made his house the constant resort of humble merit, splendid talent, high birth, and anxious speculators; among the latter were several who earnestly looked forward to becoming masters of the fortune which, it was well known, was destined for Miss Herbert as soon as she had made her own election.

The vanity of Dorinda induced her to believe that the homage she received was merely a just tribute due to her personal charms and her superior accomplishments. Not for a moment did she ever suspect that interest guided the actions, and governed the looks, of her numerous suitors.



Dorinda had no confidant; the suspicious jealousy of her mind forbade her enjoying the delicious intercourse of early friendship; and the total dissimilarity of taste, pursuits, and feelings of her brother, made all communications of a private nature with him quite impossible.

Yet Dorinda was only selfish in her affections. She was a pleasing companion, a considerate mistress, a humane and liberal benefactress, whose heart was always alive to the distresses of her fellow-creatures, and whose hand was ever open to relieve the necessities of those less fortunate than herself. Her gifts were not the offerings of ostentatious charity, but of native benevolence. Of modest worth, obscured by adversity, Dorinda was a warm patroness, provided that the object was not extolled by her parents, nor protected by her brother. In the latter case both the heart and purse of Dorinda were irrevocably closed against the suppliant.

Not so her brother. The sympathy  
which

which he expressed, and which he felt, the ardour with which he entered into the concern of the unfortunate, the soft and gentle pity with which he relieved them, made him the idol of the circle in which he moved, and the darling of his parents. His countenance was a passport to the heart, yet it proceeded not so much from the regular beauty of the features, as from the ineffable sweetness of their expression, and a conciliating smile which stamped them with goodness and affection. The tenderness of his mild blue eyes, the rich hue of his chesnut hair, which waved in natural curls over his well-shaped head, the symmetry of his pliant limbs, the unstudied elegance of his manners, and the softness of his voice, when speaking to those he loved, but particularly when giving orders to an inferior, made young Herbert universally loved and esteemed.

His father he regarded with filial veneration; to his wishes he always paid implicit obedience; but his mother-in-law was

the object of his warmest affection. With her name, with her idea, an indefinable something was coupled, which seemed to bind him more closely towards her than even her near relationship. Yet this something, which occasionally floated across his mind, and which rendered her more dear to him, as being connected with the scenes of his infancy and of his native land, was so imperfect, so dim to his recollection, that he tried to dismiss it from his memory as often as it intruded on his precious moments of scarce seclusion; while the partial fondness with which she treated him, but, above all, the half-drawn sigh, the starting tear which sometimes rushed into her eyes when they were alone, as she pressed him tenderly to her bosom, soon called into action all the watchful affection and tender sympathy of young Herbert's nature. Every year which added to his height and beauty increased also the amiable perfections of his mind, and the virtues of his heart. The pride of his father

was

was gratified at the improvement of his son's personal and mental qualifications; but the charm which endeared him most to the heart of his father was his excessive love for his mother—a love which well accorded with the feelings of Mr. Herbert, to whom his wife was as sacredly dear as on the first day of their nuptials.

The death of Mr. Herbert deeply affected his son; but the solemn bequest of his father, who dying consigned to his care and protection his disconsolate partner, called upon him for exertion. All selfish considerations vanished on beholding the deep and sincere sorrow of his mother. He thought not of himself—to alleviate her distress, to soften her anguish, was all he studied; and so strongly did he resemble his father in person and voice, that Mrs. Herbert would sometimes start from her couch, as from a dream, scarce believing that the object of her lamentation was no longer alive to sooth and console her as he was wont to do.

As soon as the affairs of Mr. Herbert could be properly arranged, his widow, much to the satisfaction of his children, proposed returning to England. Dorinda was elated at the idea of visiting a country of which she had both read and heard so much, and which appeared to be so dear to her parents; while her brother looked forward to their departure with an impatience which, considering the friendly constancy of his character, created some degree of surprise in the minds of his tutor and Mrs. Herbert. His young companions, and the various objects of his bounty (the latter of whom he had secured against suffering any pecuniary loss by his absence), were inconsolable when informed of the deprivation they had to sustain. Universally beloved and esteemed, the whole circle of their acquaintance regarded the departure of Mrs. Herbert and Arthur as a public misfortune, while those who had vainly hoped to ensure the hearts of the brother and sister, and to enjoy their splendid

did fortunes, were most loud in expressing the severity of their grief and mortification.

Herbert felt regret at quitting a few individuals, and lamented that he could not carry them with him to England; but this painful feeling decreased as the vessel brought them nearer and nearer to the white cliffs of Albion, and as Arthur remembered the solemn injunction of his father, who, in his last moments, secretly gave into his care a packet, the seals of which were to remain unbroken until the period when his son should have arrived in England. This mysterious bequest, together with his innate love for the land which gave him birth, and a strong and indefinable curiosity to behold, if possible, a spot, of the name of which he was ignorant, but which circumstances had, when a boy of only six years old, deeply imprinted on his mind, contributed to lessen the sorrow he would otherwise have felt on bidding an adieu, probably an eternal

one, to the luxurious scenes of Hindostan, and the companions of his boyhood, in whose society he had passed fifteen years of his existence.

The fatigues and terrors of the voyage, the terrible sickness attending it, and which was heightened by the irritation of a mind nervously sensible to the approach of danger, when the safety of those she loved was involved, made Mrs. Herbert seriously indisposed; and though, on leaving the ship, she regained her cheerfulness and presence of mind, yet Arthur besought her to travel slowly, lest her constitution, always delicate, but now debilitated from the heat of the climate, should suffer by the eagerness which she betrayed to reach London as early as possible.

Dotingly fond of young Herbert, his mother silently acquiesced in his wish, while the beauty of the country through which they passed, the variety of its foliage, its vivid green, the cheerful looks of the peasantry, the beauty of the women,  
and

and the cleanliness and comfort of the cottagers, were all subjects of separate admiration to Arthur and his sister, who, deeply engaged in gratifying their curiosity, saw not the silent tear of anguish which stole down the faded cheek of their mother, on once more beholding the diversified beauties of her native country—beholding them still rich and flourishing, blooming and unchanged, while she returned the shade of what she was—a widow, deprived by death of a husband whose undeviating tenderness had been the charm of her life, and whose society alone had power to still the phrenzy of despair, and lull to rest the quick and agonized feelings of an innocent mind, which had been vitally wounded by the cruelty and injustice of a near relation.

They stopped at the principal inn to dine. The next day would enable them to reach town in time to receive the visit of Mr. Glendore, who was a particular friend of the late Mr. Herbert, and to  
whose



whose kindness and hospitality his widow was indebted for having procured for her a house, and every thing suitable for the reception of the family of a person of her importance.

Arthur had strolled out after the cloth was removed, and the sight of the peasantry returning from their labours, fatigued, yet happy—hungry and thirsty, yet merry and uncomplaining, called forth the exclamation we have before noticed; and giving way to the natural liberality of his disposition, he bestowed on them the means of satisfying their wants and increasing their hilarity. The fineness of the evening induced him to return to the inn, in order that he might persuade his mother to enjoy its beauties in the open air. She, however, declined his proffered kindness, yet insisted that Dorinda should take the opportunity of surveying some ruins which were near the town.

Miss Herbert had just finished a sketch of them, and had entered the building,  
when

when her brother proposed that she should sing, to try the effect among the ruins. Dorinda had scarcely concluded when the soft tones of a flute struck her ear, and the second part of the song was sung in a fine manly voice, which was evidently at no great distance from them.

Dorinda felt alarmed. The retiredness of the place, the stillness of the hour, made her cling to the arm of Arthur for protection; but her fears dispersed when she saw two elegant-looking young men come from behind the opposite pillars, who, bowing as they passed, were quickly out of sight, but not before Herbert had caught a glance of the features of the younger, whose mournful habit ill accorded with the mirthful expression of a countenance animated and handsome.

To the restless and inquisitive mind of Arthur this stranger seemed to possess some claim to his acquaintance; he could hardly convince himself but that he had met with him before; perhaps this very  
being

being was connected with that chain of indistinct ideas which occasionally floated across the memory of Herbert, and which, though broken in parts, it was his constant but vain endeavour to unite.

Dorinda's thoughts were occupied by the landscape into which she meant to introduce the sketch she had taken, while those of her brother were full of imaginary scenes—imaginary beings; they wandered back to the time of his childhood, to his sixth year; he saw the grounds of an ancient castle—he rambled over the gently-sloping lawn with a tall and graceful boy, a few months younger than himself—he stooped to place their little vessel on the clear surface of the river which ran through the castle garden—a form of indescribable sweetness now swam before his sight—it pressed him tenderly to its snowy bosom—it parted the bright ringlets from his forehead, and kissing his cheek, united his hand with that of his young companion. So strong was his imagination, that he  
 thought

thought he heard again the well-known words—" Dear boys, may you cherish through life this pleasing affection for each other! may neither time nor circumstances have power to disunite you !"

So completely was the mind of Arthur absorbed by this favourite day-dream of his riper years, that he was not conscious of his return to the inn, until a question from Mrs. Herbert once more recalled him to himself.

The next morning they proceeded on their journey without suffering any inconvenience; and having arrived in town, proceeded to the house in Dover-street which had been provided for them by Mr. Glendore, who, with his second son, was waiting to receive them.

" Welcome to England, my dear madam," cried the former, as he supported Mrs. Herbert to the drawing-room, who, faint and unable as she then was to restrain her tears on meeting with the justly-esteemed friend of her late husband, yet  
felt

felt cheered by the pleasure which he manifested on again beholding her.

"Welcome to England!" repeated Reuben Glendore, as he extended his hand towards Arthur, who, charmed instantaneously with the open, affectionate countenance and friendly warmth of Reuben, returned the pressure, saying that he should consider their meeting as a happy omen, since the first person introduced to him on his arrival was one who, he was convinced, would authorise him to give way in future to the impression of first appearances—"I claim your friendship," continued Arthur, "not only for myself, but for my sister. Although educated in India, we are natives of this happy island; our hearts are English; and if our manners savour too much of Eastern indolence and ease, we will trust to your goodness and example to render them in time wholly English."

Reuben made a suitable and flattering reply. Both brother and sister were highly

ly impressed in his favour; and Mr. Glendore expressed his hope that the young men would feel for each other the same regard which had for so many years subsisted between their fathers.

Promising to call next day and introduce Mrs. Glendore, he shortened his visit, to the regret of Dorinda in particular, who had, in the course of an hour, discovered a something in the conversation and manners of his son more suited to her taste than she had ever found in those of any of the young men who daily resorted to the table of her deceased parent, and who, making it their study to please, and call forth her smiles, nevertheless failed to interest her half as much as this animated stranger had done, though he had even paid her no other attention than what good-breeding called for—"To-morrow," said she, "I shall see him again—to-morrow will likewise introduce me to his mother and sisters. If they are like him, I shall bestow on them every mark of my  
favour.

favour. I only hope that neither Arthur nor my mother will make a pet of this young man, and spoil him for becoming my friend."

Her brother, as well as Mrs. Herbert, was too well aware of the contradictoriness of Dorinda's nature to hazard the excitement of her displeasure. They therefore repressed their feelings, and spoke of Reuben with an affected indifference, which had the desired effect. In proportion to their coldness, she became warm in his praise; and at length, half-angry with Arthur for not being of her opinion, although she would have been wholly so if he had, she retired to her chamber, leaving her mother and brother vexed at her perversity, though neither could refrain from smiling on seeing how well their mutual plan had succeeded.

## CHAPTER II.



THE return of Mr. Glendore was anxiously looked for by his wife and their daughter Alicia. Both were delighted to learn that the long-expected family was arrived, and that the morrow would introduce to their knowledge three beings whose fortune and rank in life rendered them of sufficient importance to ensure, without any other recommendation, the good opinion of Mrs. Glendore, and to excite in the bosoms of her daughters a very natural curiosity to discover if the wealthy Herberts possessed more pleasing attractions to endear them to the hearts of young, romantic, and highly-cultivated minds, than the advantages of birth and riches.

Mr. Glendore had no sooner quitted the room, than Alicia seated herself on the knee  
of



of Reuben, and twisting her fingers in the light curls which waved over his fair and glowing cheek, inquired, with a look of arch vivacity, if Miss Herbert was handsome—handsome enough to outrival Virginia Sedley?

“My dear Alicia,” said her mother, “your sister Marian has so cried up that girl’s person, that really I verily believe she has made you all as mad as herself. Nothing goes down but Virginia Sedley. All our acquaintances are frights, unless they are like Virginia Sedley. Mercy on me! the girl would be well enough, only that you and Marian have spoiled her, by eternally praising her before her face, until at length she gives credit to all your flattering nonsense, and actually thinks herself a beauty.”

“Miss Herbert,” exclaimed Reuben hastily, “cannot boast of any personal charms; but she seems a good-natured, agreeable girl, and certainly paid me great attention. She has the air and manners of a  
woman

woman of fashion; and I hope, Alicia, that you and Marian will not attempt to spoil *her*. But are you not dying, my dear sister, to know something of her brother? I am convinced that you have made up your mind to conquer him at first sight. Nay, Alicia, that blush is truly becoming—it adds to the lustre of your eyes; look to-morrow as you do now, and I think there is some chance of your succeeding.”

Mrs. Glendore laughed heartily at the visible confusion of her favourite daughter —“ In truth, Reuben, all that I hope is, that my Alicia may captivate this rich young friend of your father’s. Could I but see her raised to a situation in life worthy of her, and which she is formed to shine in, I should die happy. Both of you, my children, have now a chance of improving not only your own fortunes, but those of your family. Do not let the opportunity pass by. Cultivate the friendship of the Herberts; it may lead to wealth and honours. But tell us, Reuben, what  
kind

kind of woman is Mrs. Herbert? Your father saw her before she went to India, and described her as being then in her twenty-second year, and handsome and engaging. That is rather better than fourteen years ago, and the heat of the climate may have destroyed her beauty."

"Beauty, my dearest mother," said her son, "is in a great degree a mere matter of taste. For instance," and he smiled archly at Mrs. Glendore, "*you* will, I am confident, discover many perfections in the person of Miss Herbert which *my* bad taste will prevent my seeing; and I, on the contrary, have already found out that her mother-in-law, though nearly seven-and-thirty, with a frame much impaired, and a constitution greatly debilitated, still retains a certain charm of voice, look, and air, which, though they may fail to call forth the wild sallies of youthful passion, are sure to excite feelings of interest, affection, and esteem."

"Why, surely this cannot be Reuben,  
the

the wild, the gay, the mirth-loving Reuben Glendore!" cried Alicia. "Positively, mamma, he has lost his heart to the rich widow of governor Herbert, and prefers seven-and-thirty to blooming seventeen. You see, mamma, that you are nearer your wishes than you expected."

"My heart you and Marian disposed of long since," replied Reuben, forcing a smile of gaiety he did not feel. "Our dear mother *then* seconded your desires; circumstances seem to have changed those desires. Ha, ha, ha! what if the baby should slip his leading-strings, run alone, and finally become his own master?" Saying this, he left the room, to the no small chagrin of his mother, who, however, was soon comforted by an assurance from Alicia, that she would pledge herself for the pliability and obedience of her brother.

Mrs. Glendore, whose sole study was to increase the slender fortunes of her children, lost no opportunity of enlarging their connexion among the affluent and high-born.

Penurious in her mode of living, she grudged every guinea spent in housekeeping, but she was lavish in articles of dress and ornament for her three daughters, whose fine figures and elegant movements had gained for them the epithet of the graces.

Miss Glendore was the beauty of the family. She was amiable and unobtrusive in her manners; and though possessed of a mind highly cultivated, and of very superior endowments to the generality of her sex, yet in conversation she was easy and affable, never assuming to herself the airs of a learned lady, though in reality her stock of knowledge far exceeded that of many of her male acquaintance. Her mornings were devoted to study, and to the composition of various literary productions, which severally added to her fame; and her evenings were passed in the society of her friends, by whom she was beloved, respected, and admired.

Miss Glendore was now in her twenty-fourth year; she had, early in life, been  
attached

attached to a gentleman of considerable merit, who was unfortunately killed in a duel, and for whose sake she had hitherto declined every proposal of marriage, none of which had power to wean her affections from her deceased lover. Notwithstanding this, her mother continued to look forward to the time when her daughter, weary of single blessedness, might be induced to accept the hand of sir Godfrey Wilson, a man of large fortune, and a devoted admirer of Miss Glendore.

Alicia, the second sister, and favourite child of Mrs. Glendore, was just turned of nineteen. Her features were not so critically handsome as those of Juliana, yet many gave the preference to her style of beauty, which at times displayed the alluring softness of Miss Glendore, and at others the fascinating animation of the graceful Marian.

The character of Alicia differed widely from either of her sisters. She possessed all their united attractions; but at heart

she was cold, selfish, and variable as the wind. With avidity she entered into all the interested plans of her mother—was governed by her in all her actions, and formed no acquaintance without her sanction. She listened with engaging attention to the conversation of persons whom she secretly despised, flattered their weakness, and, in short, always accommodated her manners to those with whom she associated. Conscious of her personal charms, she yet studied how they might be improved by art; and under the appearance of a pliant, gentle disposition, concealed a vain and haughty spirit, that could brook no rival near its throne, unless that rival was a sister.

By nature a finished coquette, Alicia contrived to keep in attendance a train of admirers, without bestowing on one in particular any mark of decided preference. Her curiosity had long been raised to behold the son of her father's friend, and the guarded replies of Mr. Glendore to all her questions

questions concerning his family only served to increase it. She could not conceal her joy on being informed of their expected arrival; it would open to her a new field of amusement, and add to the importance of her parents, who would now be able to enrol on the list of their friends the rich family of governor Herbert. All that she had heard from her father of young Herbert's character excited her admiration, and she had half resolved to bestow on him the enviable distinction of a favoured lover, an appellation which her sisters had already given to him in sport.

Marian, the youngest daughter of Mrs. Glendore, had just completed her seventeenth year. She was tall and elegantly formed; and though she could not boast of regularity of feature, yet the dazzling fairness of her complexion, the heavenly blue of her large, expressive eyes, the silken ringlets of her light brown hair, and the pearly whiteness of her teeth, joined to a

c 3

countenance



countenance beaming with tenderness and every feminine charm, rendered her a being capable of inspiring the most lasting attachment. She inherited the hereditary genius of her family. Her talent for poetry was of the higher order, and her compositions evinced the superiority of her mind, and were the effusions of a heart formed to give and to receive all the sweets of mutual affection.

Diffident to an excess, and possessing the humblest opinion of her own person, Marian sought to improve the powers of her lofty and soaring mind, and to cultivate those talents for music and drawing which nature had given her, and which her more beautiful sisters neglected. Warm in her attachments, she allowed full scope to her fancy, which never failed to deck the object of her regard with every perfection. Passionately fond of her family, she nevertheless preferred for a bosom-friend a young and lovely girl, whom  
circumstances,

circumstances, and a congeniality of taste and manners, had rendered inexpressively dear to Marian.

Virginia Sedley was only a few months younger than Marian Glendore. Their acquaintance commenced when they were in their eleventh year, and never, perhaps, was affection more tender, or friendship more sincere, than that which subsisted between Marian and Virginia. The love thus begun in childhood increased with their growth; the happiness of each appeared to depend upon their not being divided, and the first wish of Marian's generous heart was to see her friend become the wife of her idolized Reuben.

Mrs. Glendore, for her own private reasons, did not oppose this long-cherished hope of Marian. It was almost the only desire of her youngest daughter which she had not determined to thwart. Marian was never a favourite of her mother, and the weeping girl would confide this cause of domestic inquietude to the sympathizing

thizing Virginia, which she studiously concealed from her more fortunate sisters, lest she should pain them by taking notice of the marked difference in the conduct of her mother towards them and towards herself.

The extreme delicacy of her health made a constant residence in London highly injurious to the weak constitution of Marian. Her father therefore resolved upon taking a house which belonged to a lady of the name of Meredith, and which was only fifteen miles from town, in a retired and beautiful situation, and in the vicinity of several noblemen's seats, with whom Mr. Glendore, in his professional capacity as a counsellor, was acquainted. It was here that the family of Mr. Glendore first became known to Mrs. Meredith and her interesting *protégée*, Virginia Sedley.

The health of Marian began to improve after a short residence at Meredith House: she therefore passed the chief part of her time in the country, in perfecting her education,

cation, and in cultivating the friendship of Virginia, whose place of abode was only half-a-mile distant from the great house; as the common sort of people used to call the large and elegant mansion of Mrs. Meredith.

Mr. and Mrs. Glendore's family consisted also of two sons; the eldest a captain in the navy, and Reuben, who was just promoted to a lieutenancy in the army. This young man, who was the darling of his parents and the idol of his sisters, had received his education at home, under the immediate direction of his father. His chief companions were his sisters, the elder of whom assisted in forming his mind and guiding his taste. His spirits were naturally high, his wit keen and pointed, yet never aimed at the failings of his acquaintance. The goodness of his heart, and the sweetness of his temper, were unrivalled; his understanding was strong, and the versatility of his talents, his ready wit, and

mirth-loving humour, made him a delightful companion.

Few young men, on their first introduction to the world, could boast of more attention paid them by the young and old of both sexes than Reuben Glendore. His society was sought after by persons of the highest rank, and through him his sisters were first brought forward into what is termed fashionable life. Gay, thoughtless, and always to appearance happy, Reuben's real virtues were best known within the circle of his domestic fireside. Under the mask of levity, he concealed a tenderness of heart which would not suffer him to inflict unnecessary pain on any living creature. He loved his family dearer than his existence; and though he sometimes ventured to differ from his mother's opinions, yet their little quarrels always ended in an embrace, and a promise, on his part, to obey her wishes.

His sisters had equal power over him.

Accustomed

Accustomed from childhood to look up to Juliana as a second parent, and to be guided by her superior wisdom, he found it difficult, though now in his twentieth year, to shake off his dependance; in fact, he was only master of himself when absent from home; and even then the idea of Miss Glendore's censure would occasionally cast a damp upon his gayest hours. Well convinced of the superior minds and solid judgments of his sisters, Reuben felt unwilling to enter into any thing like a dispute. His affection for them, and the natural yieldingness of his nature, made him submit quietly to his habitual tutelage; even in the important affair on which his future happiness or misery depended, he had allowed them to decide—to dispose of his heart, and to select his destined bride, without his being permitted to have a dissenting voice, had his inclinations been averse to the match.

When a boy of fourteen, he became acquainted with Virginia Sedley, then in

her eleventh year: she was a tall, handsome, lively girl of her age; as thoughtless as himself, and the declared favourite of his whole family. This was sufficient to ensure the notice of Reuben; the friend of his sisters must of course be his; and Virginia soon shared the affection of Reuben, in common with his sisters. Time improved the personal attractions of Miss Sedley; and if Reuben was not actually in love with Virginia, he certainly looked forward to their union with no symptoms of dislike, though it was far from his intention to make her his wife until he had seen more of the world, and acquired that rank in the army which would enable him to provide for the necessary or imaginary wants of a gay, extravagant young woman. Circumstances had changed the situation of Virginia, and with it the inclinations and plans of a part of his family. An unforeseen event had occasioned a discovery, to him perfectly unexpected and unwished-for; it had placed his intended

bride

bride in a rank of life above his own, and, what was still more amazing, and contrary to the well-known ambitious views of his mother, this very exaltation had operated with her to the disadvantage of Virginia.

He was in London when this communication was made to him by Mrs. Glendore, and at the same time he received the agreeable account of Mrs. Herbert being on her return to England. This intelligence was followed up by the arrival of his father and mother with Alicia. Marian was unwell, and Juliana remained at Meredith House, to watch the sick chamber of her sister. Reuben gathered from the conversation of his mother the reason of the extraordinary change in her wishes respecting himself and Virginia; she had gained a title, but she had lost what constituted her charm in the eyes of the old lady, the fortune which it was privately imagined she would one day inherit.

Reuben listened to his mother with generous indignation; his heart spurned at  
the



the mercenary motives of her conduct, yet respect and filial affection kept him silent. At that moment Virginia (forsaken by her adopted mother, with the possibility of her being also neglected by Alicia, whose conduct took its colour from that of her mother) was more dear to the soul of Reuben than she had ever been before. Had he been his own master, he would have immediately set out for Meredith Cottage, to have congratulated her upon the discovery of her rank; but he was in this instance, as in many others, withheld from giving way to his natural feelings, by the complete ascendancy which his family maintained over him.

Nothing now was talked of but the splendid fortune of governor Herbert's children—of the style in which they would live—and of the additional consequence which it must give to Mr. Glendore and his family, to be on terms of close intimacy with that of Mrs. Herbert. Mrs. Glendore had already begun to throw out hints  
of

of the probability of Miss Herbert's attaching herself to Reuben, and of the advantages resulting from such an alliance.

Alicia, half-seriously, half-jestingly, seconded her mother; but as this was always done in the absence of Mr. Glendore, Reuben only laughed at their anxiety to dispose of him to the *highest bidder*. His mother scarce allowed herself breathing-time, so eager was she to procure every thing suitable for the accommodation and reception of the wealthy widow of governor Herbert. They arrived, and thus was one of Mrs. Glendore's ardent wishes obtained.

### CHAPTER III.



THE next morning Mrs. Glendore and her daughter were most flatteringly received by Mrs. Herbert and Dorinda. The studied

died elegance of Alicia's dress, her fine figure, and that fascinating manner for which the sisters were famed, had its due effect on each of the Herberts. Dorinda had sufficient discernment to perceive the cringing homage paid by Mrs. Glendore, and to contrast it with the easy polish of her daughter's deportment; yet, accustomed in India to the most servile adulation, she was not displeased to receive it from the mother of Reuben. A sympathy of feeling and ideas appeared to exist between Miss Herbert and Alicia. An hour had scarcely elapsed when they were as familiar as old acquaintance, while their brothers seemed equally friendly towards each other; and the first visit concluded by an invitation to the Glendores to dine next day in Dover-street.

At this second interview all ceremony was banished by every one present, excepting Mrs. Glendore. That lady, notwithstanding the affable and conciliating behaviour of Mrs. Herbert, could not forget,

get,

get, in her presence, the meanness of her own origin, and the vast difference which education and birth had made between them; not that Mrs. Glendore was acquainted with either the name or family of Mrs. Herbert before her marriage, but her husband had repeatedly assured her that she was related to several people of rank in England; and the exterior of Mrs. Herbert, joined to the dignified sweetness of her behaviour, justified the assertion. She could not contain her delight, on receiving the grateful thanks of the fair invalid for the services she had rendered, in procuring for her a house, and every thing suitable for her reception. Mrs. Herbert also condescendingly requested that Mrs. Glendore would add to the debt she already owed, by giving her opinion and advice on several little affairs of domestic importance, and finally recommend to her the dressmaker and milliner of her daughter.

Alicia laughingly replied, that she filled those high situations herself; but that she  
would

would be happy to attend Miss Herbert to madame Lindamire, whose taste in those matters was unrivalled.

Dorinda said that she should esteem herself greatly indebted to Miss Glendore for her offer; and it was agreed that the next morning Miss Herbert and her brother should call for Alicia and Reuben, who were to accompany them to several exhibitions then open. Mr. Glendore was invited to pass an hour or two with Mrs. Herbert, who said she wished to consult with him upon some private concerns.

Whatever the nature of these concerns might be, they had a visible effect upon the shattered nerves of Mrs. Herbert, and her children, on their return, found her low and dispirited, while the traces of recent tears were still visible on her countenance. The affection of Arthur was instantly alarmed, lest his mother had been attacked by a nervous disorder to which she was occasionally subject; but she assured him that her discomposure proceeded  
from

from the conversation which had passed between her and Mr. Glendore. “That good man,” said she, “was intimately acquainted with the most secret affairs of your beloved father, and has proved himself trustworthy. We have been talking over past events; and *that*, and the recollection of the irreparable loss I in particular have sustained, by the death of my only protector and dearest friend, have nearly overcome me.”

“My mother!” exclaimed Arthur, embracing her tenderly, “I grant that your loss is irreparable. Such a man as my father cannot be forgotten by one who loved like you, and who knew his value; yet, while *I* live, my dearest mother, it shall be my study to lighten your loss, to protect, comfort, and console you; nor shall any thing, except the hand of the Almighty, have power to separate us. Am I not indebted to you for all the attentions, the nameless tendernesses, of a mother? How often have you quitted the  
brilliant

brilliant circle of your own drawing-room to steal a look at my slumbering form! how often have you hung over me, with breathless solicitude, when the flush of fever crimsoned my cheek, while your quick-dropping tears cooled my burning forehead! and how many excuses have you framed to hide my boyish irregularities, and save me from the just reproof of my father! Ah, my mother, can I do less than devote to you a life which your own tenderness has saved, and which is only valuable to me as it can benefit you!"

Mrs. Herbert pressed him to her bosom, then extended her hand towards his sister — "My Dorinda," said she, "I rejoice to see that you are likely to meet with an agreeable companion in Alicia Glendore. I doubt not that her sisters are equally pleasing. My Arthur will also find a friend in her brother, who seems an amiable young man; and I am happy that, as my health will for the present prevent my going into company, you will be able to enjoy,

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enjoy, under the protection of that family, all the amusements of town. I wish you to cultivate their good opinion; their society promises you many pleasures."

"I hope also, mamma," replied Dorinda, "that you will participate in them. I am quite delighted with Alicia; she is by far the most sensible and well-informed girl I have yet met with; and, with your permission, I should like to make her a present of one of my best Indian chains, as an earnest of my esteem."

"You are at liberty, my dear girl, to act as you think proper. To-morrow we are to spend the day with them. I shall select some articles for Mrs. Glendore and her daughters, which I hope they will think worthy of their acceptance. I am under infinite obligations to their father; and judging of his feelings by my own, I cannot prove my sense of them better than in acts of kindness to his children. Make what addition you like to the chain,  
my



my dear Dorinda; I never wish to check the liberality of your inclinations. It is my intention to give each of the Miss Glendores a set of Eastern ornaments, to wear with the dresses which I purposely brought over for them."

This unexpected display of Mrs. Herbert's generosity completely won the heart of Mrs. Glendore. It produced an instantaneous effect on the organs of her sight. She became blind to whatever foibles she before suspected her of possessing; and as she cast an admiring look at the costly presents, she thought the giver one of the most perfect of her sex.

A few particular friends had been invited to meet the widow of governor Herbert; among them was a doctor Bedingfield, a physician, with whose amenity of manners Mrs. Herbert was much pleased; nor was he less charmed by the sweetness of hers. He advised her not to remain any time in London, but to try the bene-  
ficial

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ficial effects of her native air, which, he affirmed, would, in all probability, entirely restore her to the blessings of health.

“ If that is your opinion, doctor,” cried Mr. Glendore, “ it will make me extremely happy if my dear friend will condescend to become my guest at Meredith House, which is situated near the place of her nativity; and if the restoration of her health depends upon pure air, good nursing, and the sincerest affection, every member of my family is disposed to afford her the two latter; and for the former, it is not to be found in any spot more salubrious than at ———. I am convinced that Marian would never have lived had we not taken her there.”

Alicia, meanwhile, drew such an animated picture of the beauty of the situation, and dwelt with such pride and pleasure on the character of her sisters, that Mrs. Herbert, whose secret inclinations were already there, consented, to the great joy of Mrs. Glendore, to become her guest  
for

for a month. She, nevertheless, felt a reluctance to leave town without her children having partaken of its gaieties. Dorinda, however, who, in the course of a few days, had conceived a strong affection for Reuben, and who was delighted by the description which Alicia had given of Juliana and Marian, felt an ardent desire to behold them, as well as to be under the same roof with their brother. She therefore instantly seconded the wishes of Arthur, who entreated that his mother would only consult her own health—"Besides, mamma," said she, "my friend informs me that the town is quite thin at this season of the year, and that every body of any consequence is in the country. The winter is the proper time to enjoy the festivities of London."

Mrs. Herbert, with whom the air of town had always disagreed, consented to quit it in the space of a week; and in the mean time Reuben proposed to pay a visit to Meredith House, to apprise his sisters  
of

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of their unexpected pleasure; and he invited young Herbert to accompany him, to which the latter readily assented.

It was a matter of joyous exultation to the quick-sighted Mrs. Glendore to perceive, in the dark eyes of Dorinda Herbert, whenever they rested on Reuben, a language which the old lady translated to her own satisfaction. She consulted with her favourite daughter, who agreed in thinking that the rich heiress already felt a partiality for her brother; and as Mrs. Glendore placed implicit confidence in the discernment of Alicia, she suffered herself to believe that Reuben was the happy man destined to become master of Miss Herbert and her splendid fortune. She seemed even half inclined to quarrel with Alicia for not making it her chief study to captivate the heart of Arthur.

“It will be your own fault,” said she, “if you do not secure him to yourself. Could I but see you his wife, enjoying

all the luxuries of his immense wealth, I should be contented to die to-morrow. Consult his taste, my Alicia, in every thing; watch his very looks when you are in the country, and be always at his elbow to anticipate his wishes."

Alicia promised obedience — "But, mamma," said she, laughingly, "perhaps the pensive and learned Juliana may better suit his fancy, or the graceful and poetical Marian. You will then have him for a son."

"But he will not be *your* husband," replied her mother gravely. "Juliana is not likely to be estranged from her books; and woe be to Marian if she presumes to play off any of her sentimental airs to catch the attention of Mr. Herbert!"

"You forget, mamma," cried Alicia, "that the heart of Marian is already disposed of."

"True," said Mrs. Glendore; "I forgot it, because it is a subject which I do not wish

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wish to remember. The obstinacy of the Italian in that affair has cost me many a pang."

"Alas! my dear mamma, it is in vain to war against destiny. Marriages, you know, are made in heaven, at least so our old nurse tells me; and who knows but it may be ordained, mamma, that I should become Mrs. Herbert? I assure you that he has already paid me some very flattering compliments, and a month's residence at Meredith House will most likely decide the important subject."

Alicia, in this instance, only asserted what was true. In fact, she had studied more deeply the character and taste of Arthur Herbert than she chose to acknowledge, even to her partial mother; as, in case of the failure of her plan, her pride would be hurt by its being made public. The attentions of a girl like Alicia Glendore could not remain unnoticed by a young man accustomed to receive them from all the females who used to fre-

quent the governor's house. His vanity (for where is the being who does not possess more or less of this pernicious quality?) was gratified by the apparent preference of a mind superior to any he had yet met with. The accomplishments and general knowledge of Alicia made her society desirable, and he was also much attached to her brother, as, indeed, were all who were acquainted with Reuben Glendore.

A week had already elapsed since his arrival in England, and the packet given him by his father remained unopened. His time had been so completely occupied by the Glendores, that this singular bequest, from a parent whom he loved and revered, had quite escaped his memory.

Returning home one evening, after having passed the day with his fascinating friends, and been more than commonly attentive to Alicia, he ordered his servant to bring him a small trunk, in which was some otto of roses, a bottle of which he had promised to carry to Alicia the next morning.

ing. This trunk also contained the dying gift of the governor, which no sooner met the eye of his son than he reproached himself severely for his neglect. Hastily breaking the seals, he discovered a letter addressed to himself, and a morocco case. Checking his first impulse, which was to examine the contents of the case, he unfolded the letter, and read as follows:—

“ My dear and best-beloved Arthur, long before this will be perused by you, the hand that writes it will be mouldering in the dust, and the heart which now beats with the strongest feelings of paternal love and confidence will have ceased to throb. I have passed through life, my son, with the single exception of one circumstance, without having performed any action which need call a blush upon the cheeks of my Arthur. Yet this one circumstance, my beloved boy, has poisoned the happiness which would otherwise



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happened, been my lot. It has turned my purest pleasures into pains, and the dreadful idea of having injured the peace, and destroyed the repose, of an innocent and unoffending creature, has haunted my imagination in my hours of domestic bliss. I have not courage to tell my son what may diminish his respect for the memory of his father. Should, however, any thing occur, during your residence in England, to make such a disclosure necessary, my excellent friend Glendore is in possession of my fatal secret ; but remember, my son, as you respect the strict injunction of a dying parent, remember that no motive of *curiosity* must prompt you to pry into the failings of him who gave you being—remember that it must be only strong necessity ; that nothing less than its being essential to your own future happiness must tempt you to apply for an explanation to my friend. Should your heart be as susceptible as mine, it will point out to you my meaning, and render a disclosure inevitable.

vitale. In that case I appeal to your filial tenderness for my excuse.

“The enclosed miniature is the resemblance of one whom I have deeply injured. I am unknown to her, perhaps even by name; but should chance conduct you into her presence, should you find her in want of a friend to watch over and to direct her steps, be you that friend, my Arthur, that natural protector, of which my conduct deprived her. Should she be in need of that fortune, for the loss of which she is also indebted to my rashness, remember that you have more than sufficient. The genuine benevolence of your nature, and the delicacy of your mind, will teach you how to bestow the gift. I know of no man better calculated than yourself to do a favour, and yet make the receiver appear as if he conferred the obligation.

“The object for whose welfare in life I am thus anxious, and for whom I feel the affection of a father, has a claim of the tenderest nature upon your honour and  
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liberality.

liberality. I have said enough—my son from his boyhood has ever sympathized with the unfortunate, anticipated their wants, and relieved their miseries. The misfortunes of this amiable female cannot fail to interest a heart ever alive to the distresses of a fellow-creature. The confidence I have thus reposed in your *honour*, your *prudence*, my dear Arthur, must be known only to *yourself*, unless, as I have before stated, your own happiness should be involved in the disclosure; Mr. Glendore will then explain to you this seeming mystery.”

“Mystery indeed!” exclaimed young Herbert, closing the letter, and taking up the morocco case, in expectation of beholding the likeness of one old enough to be his mother; but what was his surprise on seeing the miniature of a beautiful girl, evidently not more than fifteen! He gazed on the smiling features with a new-born feeling,

feeling, by no means favourable to the secret wishes of Alicia Glendore.

The painter had evidently gloried in the subject—it was a masterpiece of art—the ivory, in short, seemed to breathe, and the snowy skin to blush at the ardent gaze of Herbert. To nature alone this lovely girl appeared indebted for the unadorned witchery of her person. Her eyes were of the darkest hazel, brilliant, yet tender; her Grecian features were expressively soft, yet an arch smile which played about her small and beautiful mouth, told, that when animated, she was equally captivating. Her light chesnut hair waved over her forehead, and, parting, discovered the well-curved eyebrows; while some of the glossy ringlets fell with graceful negligence over her shoulders, exquisitely formed, and partly veiled her bosom, half rising above the muslin frock, giving fair promise of its future symmetry.

As if spell-bound, Arthur continued to hold in his hand the singular gift of his

deceased parent. The longer he viewed it, the more familiar part of its features seemed; they reminded him of a well-known face; yet it was highly improbable that any relationship should exist between this sweet girl and the person he thought of. In what manner could his father, who was famed for every endearing quality, every generous feeling, have injured so lovely a creature? Yet that he *had* injured her was past a doubt, since the governor himself had said so.

“ Ah!” he cried, “ my father needed not to have enjoined me so solemnly to protect and succour, if necessary, a being whose exterior must be a passport to every heart. But how, without knowing her name or place of abode, can I fulfil his wishes? It is evident that Mr. Glendore could direct my search; but him I am forbidden to apply to, unless my own happiness should demand the inquiry. Strangely incomprehensible! how can the happiness of my future life be anywise connected  
with

with this sweet girl? and yet my father tells me that she has a claim of the strongest nature upon my honour and liberality; that he felt for her the affectionate solicitude of a parent. Gracious Heaven! perhaps he was really her father, and this lovely maid claims from me the protecting care of a brother." He paused; his eyes still rested on the miniature; an unpleasant feeling entered his heart; it seemed as if he could willingly give up half of his fortune to be assured that no such relationship existed between them. Again he read over the letter of his father, and again he contemplated his singular bequest.

"I am foolish," said he, "to be thus affected about a being who may, by this time, have lost the magic of youthful beauty. This may be only the resemblance of a female, now old enough to be my mother; and yet, how my father could love, deeply injure, and be unknown to her, perhaps even by name, is a mystery

which I cannot define. Sacred, however, will be his commands—old or young, the original of this miniature cannot fail to interest my humanity.”

He closed the case; it was not, however, consigned to the trunk, but carefully placed, with the letter, in a private drawer of his writing-desk.

The next morning he accompanied his mother and sister to Mr. Glendore's. The former was shown into the study, while himself and Dorinda were conducted by Reuben to the drawing-room. Arthur presented Alicia with the delicious perfume which he had promised her, and which became of double value as being his gift. She, however, observed that his eyes were languid, and that his vivacity seemed forced. As if by sympathy, hers was immediately affected. She sighed deeply as she expressed a fear that he was unwell, and wished her brother to postpone their intended journey to Meredith House until next day. To this, however,

Arthur

Arthur would not consent, assuring her that her fears were groundless, as he was perfectly well.

They were no sooner gone than Mrs. Glendore, taking advantage of her husband's absence, said—"Reuben, you will tell your sisters that we shall be with them in three or four days, and that I shall expect to find every thing proper for the reception of such a guest as Mrs. Herbert. Desire Marian, if she is able, to see that old Jenny gets the best and second best rooms thoroughly aired for Miss Herbert and her brother; and do you mind, Reuben, that he is made perfectly comfortable. Let Jenny know that she need not be quite so frugal in her housekeeping, and not to spare the poultry, or any thing else, while the Herberts are with us. The best we have is but poor fare for them, accustomed, as they have been, to every luxury. Yet I think, Reuben, that Miss Herbert seems far happier when she is with us than at her own home."

"Very



“ Very likely, my dear mother, as she is evidently attached to Alicia.”

“ To say not a word of a little *penchant* for her brother,” cried Alicia, gaily. “ Come, Reuben, confess. Did you ever see a woman improve more than she does upon a further acquaintance ?”

“ I really cannot tell,” replied Reuben, carelessly ; “ all that I know is, that she appears a sensible and accomplished girl, and has certainly taken a great fancy to us.”

“ I wish, Reuben, that I could perceive a similar fancy in you towards her,” said Mrs. Glendore. “ I should have thought that her wealth and condition in life, with the evident partiality she feels for you, would have made you quite proud of your conquest.”

“ And so I am, mother, certainly,” replied Reuben, laughing, “ proud as you could wish me to be. Dorinda would be a very agreeable companion, with whom I should like to trifle away an idle hour,  
did

did I not feel too much esteem for Mrs. Herbert, and too great a regard for Arthur, to sport with the peace of his sister. But, in good earnest, mother, I am not so vain as to impute the flattering conduct of Dorinda to any other cause than the general kindness she seems to entertain for us all."

"If you should be mistaken, Reuben," said Alicia.

Reuben took up his hat.—"I hate to be plagued, Alicia, and shall therefore go and stroll down Bond-street before I call for Herbert. Have you any other message, mother, for my sisters?"

"None, my dear boy; only remember, Reuben, how dearly I love you, and how anxious I am to see you rise in the perilous profession which you have chosen. Remember how much depends on your present conduct, how much you will be able to do for your sisters, should you but take advantage of the partiality of Miss Herbert. It is better to have a rich wife,  
though

though a plain one, than a pennyless beauty. As you are too young to judge for yourself, be guided, my dear son, by me. You have not seen Virginia since the discovery of who was her father. Poor girl ! I pity her ; and had she been less vain, less thoughtless, I might still have been induced, notwithstanding her want of fortune, to receive her as my daughter. But I am terribly afraid that she has deceived us all, and that the seeds of pride, vanity, and dissipation, are too thickly sown in her nature for us to eradicate. If I thought, Reuben, that you still continued to look upon Virginia as your future wife, I should be miserable."

Reuben loved his mother too dearly to bear the idea of her being miserable on his account. He laid down his hat, and seating himself by her side, affectionately kissed her.

" You need not be uneasy, mother," said he ; " I am neither going to marry Virginia, nor any one else, at present. You  
and

and my sisters have managed me as you please; yet had I, a few months back, been as hasty as yourselves, I should, by this, have been too firmly engaged to Virginia to have receded with honour. I thought it impossible that my sisters could ever love her less than they did then, and must confess, that should Virginia prove undeserving of the affection they have shown her, it will give me real concern."

"Virginia's self can alone diminish our attachment," replied Alicia. "The tenderness we bore her was founded on her supposed virtues. Should we discover that they were only the creation of our own brains, however dear it may cost us, we must be compelled to own ourselves deceived. I do not, however, say that this is exactly the case, although I have seen much to discommend in Virginia since the death of her father."

"I always thought her proud and scornful," said Mrs. Glendore; "but since that event took place, she has carried herself  
with

with as haughty an air as if he had left her a large fortune, instead of not even remembering her name in his will."

Reuben started from his seat—"I must be gone," said he, trying to force a smile on one of the most amiable faces in the world, "or Miss Herbert will accuse me of loitering."

In a moment he was out of sight; the accustomed kiss which he always bestowed on his mother and sister was forgotten. The heart of Reuben was full of sympathy; it throbbed with a tenderness which the beauty of Virginia had failed to create, but to which her misfortunes alone had given rise.

Reuben was evidently dispirited when he arrived at Mrs. Herbert's; and Dorinda, whose curiosity was immediately excited to a painful degree, at seeing so novel a circumstance as Reuben Glendore out of spirits, became in her turn pensive and absent.

The dinner over, the young men rose  
to

to take leave. Mrs. Herbert embraced her son.—“ My dearest Arthur,” said she, “ I can hardly spare you, though I hope to be with you in a few days. Tell the Miss Glendores that I and Dorinda already love them; that our thoughts will be at Meredith House; and that, if possible, I shall see them this week. I shall be uneasy, however, if I do not receive a line from you by to-morrow’s post; and be careful, my Arthur, not to expose yourself to the night-air.” Then turning towards Reuben, and giving him her hand, which he instantly raised to his lips—“ You know not,” she continued, “ my dear sir, how necessary to my peace is the presence of my beloved Arthur; if you did, you would wonder that I could so readily consent to his accompanying you. I think you are not quite so old as he is; however, I shall entrust him to your care—pray do not let him go out in the damp of the evening.”

Reuben promised all she wished, then  
hurrying

hurrying after his friend, leapt into the chaise; which in a few hours conveyed them to the estate of one of the most eccentric characters in England.

## CHAPTER IV.



Mrs. Meredith was the widow of a rich brewer, who, having amassed a considerable fortune in trade, left his wife in possession of a clear estate of six thousand a-year, which, with sundry legacies bequeathed her by different relations, together with her own rigid economy, had accumulated to eight thousand. Notwithstanding the largeness of her income, Mrs. Meredith, though childless, preserved the strictest parsimony in the regulation of her household. Meredith House, which had been built by her husband upon a large and handsome scale, she had let to  
Mr.

Mr. Glendore for seven years, residing herself in a small white cottage, which had been fitted up by Mr. Meredith as a comfortable abode for a widowed sister of his wife.

This sister died, and Mrs. Meredith immediately resolved to let the *great house*, and remove herself to the cottage. Fond of society, though she always contrived that it should cost her little, she visited all the neighbouring families, recommended to them, as servants, the sons and daughters of her tenants, and distributed their charity to such objects as she thought in need of it. By this means, and with little expence to herself, she gained what she was most desirous of, the character of a humane and benevolent old woman. Having seen a great deal of the world, and knowing something of every body and every thing, she was a pleasing and entertaining companion. Her voice was uncommonly persuasive, and as she was always profuse in her offers of serving those



those who, she was well aware, did not want her assistance, and of making little presents where the return would be double to what she gave, she in general contrived to make herself a welcome guest wherever she went.

Her family consisted of herself, and of a young lady whom she had brought up from a child, three women-servants, a coachman (for she was obliged, by the will of her husband, to keep her carriage), and a man who served in the double capacity of gardener and footman. The females, except one, were daughters of her tenantry, to whom she gave small wages, made them live hard, do just what they were bid, and if they were docile and quick, got them into good places, and took others to whom she acted in the same manner. Their parents, grateful for this show of kindness in one so rich, never failed to carry her the earliest produce of their gardens. Their richest cream, their best butter, or even their poultry, were always at her

her service; thus she was sure to be a gainer by what they deemed her affability and condescension.

This singular being was a strange mixture of pride and meanness. Mrs. Meredith at home, and Mrs. Meredith abroad, were two distinct characters. At home, even while she resided at the great house, she rose by five in the morning, saw to the milking of her cows, feeding of her pigs, &c.; then went into her garden, weeded the walks, and frequently took the young girls to help her to pick up the stones from her fields. She was a constant visitor to the kitchen, generally attended to the cooking, and saw that the provisions were not wasted. As she sometimes spent a few days in town, she entrusted the management of her family, during her absence, to the care of an elderly female, who was called the housekeeper, but who, in fact, was any thing, according to the will of her mistress. The carriage was no sooner out of sight than the holidays commenced

commenced at Meredith House. Order and regularity were banished; the young female servants, with Virginia at their head, ranged at pleasure all over the apartments of Meredith House. Its fields and gardens were the scenes of their innocent mirth; nor was obedience or labour thought of until the return of Mrs. Meredith. It was then that Virginia would playfully throw her graceful arms round the neck of the old lady, and beg her not to be angry if all was not finished that she had left orders to be done, as she alone was to blame, but would willingly help the maids to make amends for lost time.

Mrs. Meredith was of a cheerful disposition. She loved children, and Virginia more than any. Kissing her fair and blooming cheek, she would only say—“You are a bad girl, my Virginia—a sad romp. You spoil all my maids; but you will know better when you are older.”

She then laid aside her outgoing clothes, put on an old, black, quilted petticoat, a  
rusty

rusty silk gown of the same dismal hue, a shawl quite in unison with the gown, and an old beaver hat, without a morsel of nap to tell what it once had been. The silk stockings were exchanged for cotton or worsted, and the laced cap for a plain one. A pair of the legs of some old black stockings were drawn on her arms; and thus equipped, with her long stick in her hand, she sallied forth to see what depredations her youthful charge and her companions had committed, during her absence.

In taking upon herself a responsibility of such importance as the care and education of Virginia Sedley, Mrs. Meredith was impelled at first by two motives—the probable advantages which would result to herself from the natural gratitude of Virginia's father, and the praise which the generosity and kindness of the action would call forth from every person acquainted with it. The connexion commenced in the following manner.

Providence ordained, that just at the period when Virginia lost her mother, Mrs. Meredith was on a visit to a family, only a short distance from the estate of her father. The deprivation of a parent's protecting care was attended by circumstances of the most painful nature; and Mrs. Meredith, though unknown to lord de Morville, waited on him, as soon as decency would permit, to condole with him on his misfortune, and to propose to take charge of his infant daughter, then only two years old. The persuasive voice and soothing manners of Mrs. Meredith, aided by his own private reasons, made his lordship close immediately with her offer; and after the necessary arrangements, Virginia was consigned to the protection of her new friend, with an allowance of two hundred a-year for her board, education, and clothing.

According to the wish of lord de Morville, Virginia was to be brought up as Miss Sedley, the daughter of a gentleman abroad;

abroad ; her education was to be simple, her dress plain, and every care taken to withhold from her knowledge the rank of her father.

Mrs. Meredith agreed to these singular terms, from a supposition that time would effect a change in the intentions of lord de Morville. In this, however, she was mistaken ; his lordship continued obstinately bent upon the system he had at first adopted. The quarterly allowance was paid to the very day on which it became due ; but from the hour of his daughter's quitting de Morville Castle, he had declined seeing her, notwithstanding the repeated solicitations of Mrs. Meredith, that he would honour her by a visit, and be an eyewitness to the personal improvements of his child.

The cold, unfeeling conduct of lord de Morville strengthened the claim which Virginia had upon the affection and humanity of Mrs. Meredith. In proportion as she felt convinced that her lovely charge

was abandoned by her natural protector, she redoubled her endeavours to bestow on her an education suitable to her real rank, yet avoid incurring any heavy expence. Recollecting that her brother's eldest daughter had been governess in a nobleman's family, but was now returned home, for the purpose of superintending the studies of a younger sister, Mrs. Meredith wrote to her brother, and invited Miss Meredith and Winifred to take up their residence with her, offering to find them in clothes and other necessaries.

Mr. Meredith was in a situation of life which made him catch at every show of remembrance or kindness from so rich a relation. Miss Meredith also rejoiced at an invitation so unexpected, and, with Winifred, hastened to obey the welcome summons of her aunt. The eccentricities of Mrs. Meredith's character were well known to her eldest niece; she therefore studied how to win her good opinion; and being naturally of a steady, economical, placid

placid disposition, she soon obtained her desire.

The task of instructing Miss Sedley in the various accomplishments of fashionable education became a matter of pleasing amusement to Miss Meredith. Her aunt made her occasional little presents, as an incentive to continue her exertions ; and thus was a governess of no mean abilities procured for Virginia at a cheap rate, and at the same time increasing the fame of Mrs. Meredith's goodness of heart, in taking under her protection her two nieces. It also gave to Virginia a companion in Winifred, more suitable than those she had hitherto associated with.

The erroneousness of the old saying, "a woman cannot keep a secret," was fully verified in Mrs. Meredith. Most sacredly had she preserved that confided to her by lord de Morville, yet she could not avoid throwing out hints to Mr. Glendore and his family, of the fortune which she seri-



ously believed Virginia would one day inherit. These were not lost on the mercenary mind of his wife, who therefore did not attempt to check the fondness of her daughters for Miss Sedley; neither did she oppose their united wishes to see their idolized friend become, ~~at~~ a proper period, the wife of Reuben; firmly imagining, as she did, that she was to be Mrs. Meredith's heiress.

Mr. Glendore, who loved his own repose too much to contradict the usual plans of his wife, suffered her and his daughters to have their own way. It was seldom or ever that he ventured to dispute with Mrs. Glendore. She was a good wife and a good mother; the faults she had were too deeply rooted for him to eradicate; he therefore generally contrived to retreat to his study when he saw her disposed to be severe on the conduct of others—an amusement to which she was but too much inclined, and which the natural lenity

lenity of his disposition precluded him from enjoying.

With the appearance of Virginia he was as much pleased as his daughters. The blended likeness of both her parents, which was visible in her highly-interesting countenance, made him instantly suspect whose child she was. Taking, therefore, a proper opportunity, he questioned Mrs. Meredith so closely, and testified so much paternal solicitude for her young charge, that she frankly acknowledged his suspicions were just, but that he was the only person to whom she had divulged the secret.

Mr. Glendore bestowed on her the warmest commendations for her generous protection of the lovely girl. He approved of *her* conduct as much as he reprobated the injustice and cruelty of lord de Morville's. *He* also was in possession of a secret, but he meant not to repay the confidence of Mrs. Meredith, by divulging what he had never even breathed a hint

of to his own wife. He applauded the honour with which the old lady had kept her word, and gave his, in return, to hold her communication inviolable.

Mrs. Meredith smiled—"Of course you except Mrs. Glendore?" said she. "Man and wife are but one."

"In this instance," he replied, returning her good-natured smile with one equally pleasing, "we are two distinct beings. I have my own reasons for particularly wishing Mrs. Glendore to be kept in ignorance of all that concerns Miss Sedley."

"Well, you know best, most assuredly," said the old lady. "My young charge is naturally high-minded, and I am by no means desirous that she should become acquainted with the rank of her father, unless he increased her allowance. What, Mr. Glendore, is two hundred a-year for the board, education, and clothing of a nobleman's daughter? Had I not acted with the most rigid economy, and procured for her the instructions of my niece,  
I could

I could not have made it answer. I am in hopes, however, that as she grows older, lord de Morville will remember that her expences will increase, and be induced to settle something on her for life."

"Lord de Morville is a cold-hearted, unfeeling scoundrel!" replied Mr. Glendore, quite off his guard; "he was a bad husband, and he is a bad father. I am much mistaken if he ever adds a guinea to the sum which necessity alone compelled him to advance for her maintenance. The Almighty has proved his watchful care of Miss Sedley by placing her under your protection; and God grant that she may never stand in need of any assistance from her father!"

Mrs. Meredith perceived that Mr. Glendore knew more of his lordship than he chose to avow, yet she was too polite to question him on a subject which he, from that hour, evidently avoided. Next to her money, she loved Virginia Sedley above all earthly things. She had brought her

up from the age of two years—she had witnessed the gradual improvement of a person lovely and fascinating, without being assisted by the aid of dress or ornament—she had experienced from her a thousand little acts of affection, which made amends for her thoughtless mischievousness and monkey-tricks—and when she hindered the maids, stole the cream from the dairy, or plucked some of her finest fruit, which was intended for the market, the old lady's anger was quickly disarmed by the tears and kisses of the beautiful penitent.

Virginia, meanwhile, ignorant of her rank, obeyed with cheerful alacrity the orders of Mrs. Meredith. She assisted the old lady and her maids to weed the garden, feed the poultry, and do many little domestic affairs. The plainness of her dress never gave her a moment's concern; though sometimes, of a Sunday, when she accompanied Mrs. Meredith to church, she thought how much she should like to  
have

have her straw bonnet trimmed the same as the Miss Lambtons, instead of the single piece of green ribbon which tied her own, and which was to last her a stated time. Sashes were also deemed unnecessary; and in order to save washing, Virginia seldom wore any other dress than grey stuff, except when she went to church.

The arrival of the Miss Merediths gave a new turn to the mind and inclinations of our heroine. In the youngest, who was a year older than herself, she found a sensible, well-informed, good-natured companion, who often, though unintentionally, made her blush at her own ignorance. Proud and haughty by nature, she determined soon to rectify this fault. Conscious of her own superior talents to those of Winifred Meredith, she learnt with eagerness the lessons given her by her sister, and made such rapid progress in her studies, that she had no longer cause to blush at her own inferior knowledge.

Under the tuition of a being so mild

and conciliatory as Miss Meredith, Virginia became acquainted with her own language in its native purity—spoke French and Italian with ease and elegance—drew tolerably—and displayed all the requisites of one who would excel in music. By dint of the most persevering entreaties, she at last coaxed Mrs. Meredith into a promise of buying an instrument. It was no sooner obtained than Virginia forgot the delights of romping. Every moment of leisure was devoted to her favourite study; and the old lady, for the first time in her life, did not regret having parted with her money.

When the family of Mr. Glendore first took possession of Meredith House, she was taken by its singular owner to pay them an introductory visit. Virginia was then only turned of eleven; she was tall, and notwithstanding her embarrassment, attractively graceful. The polished and affable manners of the Miss Glendores soon dispelled her natural reserve; the  
visit

visit was immediately returned, and from that day Virginia seemed to have become a new creature. All the amiable traits of her character were now unfolded, as well as those little weaknesses almost inseparable from human nature. She loved Winifred Meredith, but she idolized the Glendores. The affection of Winifred, and the yieldingness of her temper, made her wholly subservient to Virginia. She never differed from her in opinion, or thought it possible that her lovely friend could do wrong.

Marian Glendore loved the favourite of her family with an attachment bordering on romance, yet she saw her failings, and strove to correct them. Only a few months older than Miss Sedley, she was gifted by nature with a mind and genius that made her capable of reasoning with solidity, and of adding practice to theory. Brilliant talent, cultivated taste, and sound judgment, were accompanied by a tenderness of heart, and a warmth of expression,  
that



that never failed to subdue the high spirit of Virginia, conquer her pride, and melt her into tears of grateful affection.

The ambitious and aspiring soul of Virginia had now a new incentive to prosecute her studies. She wished to deserve the profusion of praise bestowed on her by the friends she loved dearer than her existence; perhaps also she wished to gain the praises of Reuben, who, lavish of his caresses to his sisters, would sometimes venture to touch the glowing cheek of their idol, while his own appeared to borrow from hers some of its blushing modesty.

The happiness of Virginia knew but one alloy. Surrounded by friends who seemed to idolize her—the constant companion of Marian, on whom she doted—the intended wife of Reuben, for such, from her twelfth year, she had been accustomed to hear herself called, still Virginia's affectionate heart longed to know more of that parent whose distance from England prevented

prevented her from enjoying the sweets of paternal tenderness. But as she older grew, she could not comprehend what obstacle could hinder her from *hearing* from him. The replies of Mrs. Meredith only served to inflame her curiosity. The good sense of Marian, to whom it was an equal mystery, and the deference Virginia always paid to her opinion and advice, made her seldom start the subject to one who uniformly counselled her to wait with patience, to enjoy the happiness within her reach, nor embitter present pleasures by anticipating future evils. To Winifred, therefore, she unbosomed herself; and as she wept at the coldness and strange want of affection in her father, found comfort from the sympathetic tears of Winifred, who thought and said exactly as she wished.

The period was now arrived when the curiosity of Virginia was to be gratified at the expence of her tranquillity. On the eve of completing her sixteenth year,

Mrs.

Mrs. Meredith determined to celebrate her birthday with more than usual festivity, as one expence would also do for the nuptials of her eldest niece, who, it was agreed, should bestow her hand on a friend of Mr. Glendore on that day. Virginia lamented her inability to present her amiable instructress with any valuable mark of her gratitude—"I am poor in every thing but affection," said she, embracing her; "but should I ever become mistress of a full purse, the first money I spend shall be dedicated to you."

Mrs. Meredith had invited all the family of the Glendores to witness the marriage of her niece, and to partake of the wedding-dinner. In the evening Mrs. Glendore was to give a ball at Meredith House, for which she had sent cards of invitation to all the neighbouring families.

Mrs. Meredith had written to lord de Morville an accurate account of his daughter's studies; she dwelt on the improvement of her person, which, in order to  
 please

please his vanity, she told him was very like his own—described her mode of passing her time—and, finally, assured him that she had not only, to the best of her abilities, brought up Virginia to be an ornament to society, but to be an economical and frugal housewife. She, however, solicited his lordship to make a further addition of a hundred a-year to the two already allowed her, as Miss Sedley was now arrived to an age when the expences of her dress must necessarily be increased by her mixing with the world.

His lordship's reply was short. He enclosed a hundred pound bank-note, but refused to settle the same on Miss Sedley annually. He thanked Mrs. Meredith for the services she had rendered him in taking charge of Virginia, and in keeping inviolate the secret of her rank. He offered to provide for two of her nephews, either in the army or the navy—complained severely of his own debilitated health—entreated her to preserve the same silence

lence as ever—and begged her acceptance of a valuable repeating watch, as a mark of his esteem.

Mrs. Meredith very joyfully received this solid proof of lord de Morville's remembrance, and did not despair of gaining at last her point with him. She instantly wrote to accept his proffered kindness for her nephews, who were immediately rated as midshipmen, and sent out under the protection of two of his lordship's relations. With part of the hundred pounds intended for Virginia, Mrs. Meredith bought her an elegant dress, to be worn as bride's-maid to her niece, to whom she also presented her wedding garments; but as she was fortunately engaged to a man of some fortune and good connexions, she thought she could do well enough without any further assistance from her. It was, however, generally supposed, that at her death her nieces would be handsomely remembered in her will.

The young heart of Virginia was, for  
the

the first time, elated by the feelings of gratified vanity. Accustomed to the plainest habiliments from her childhood, she could not contemplate what she deemed the gift of Mrs. Meredith without experiencing sensations of delight at the beauty of the lace and the fineness of the muslin. She hastened to array herself in what she so much admired, and what she thought so much became her.

Her companion, Winifred, assisted her in what was *now* become the important affair of the toilette. The glass of Virginia, hitherto but little consulted, spoke also a new language to its lovely mistress, as she gazed on the finely-proportioned figure, the glowing countenance, the brilliant hazel eyes, shaded by the long silken eyelash, which softened their lustre. Vanity, that poison of the female mind—that canker of the heart, which corrodes its best affections, crept into the yet-innocent soul of Virginia, and by first teach-  
ing

ing her to compare her own person with that of others, convinced her that she was beautiful. A blush of pleasure heightened the colour on her cheek. “What,” thought Virginia, “will be the opinion of Reuben on this wonderful difference in my appearance? will he not to-day join in the praise which I am certain of receiving from his sisters, or will he preserve the same careless air as usual?”

Eager to have her doubts removed, Virginia hurried to the drawing-room, where the bride and bridegroom were only waiting for the arrival of Mr. Glendore’s family. They came—Virginia’s bosom heaved at their approach. The Miss Glendores, whispering, told her how lovely she looked—how much her dress became her. Marian adjusted and restrained some of her rich chesnut curls; then pressing her lips to the crimson cheek of Virginia, softly said—“Beloved friend of my soul! how I anticipate the blissful moment which,

which,

which, I trust, is not far distant, when my Reuben shall claim the hand of my dear Virginia!"

Miss Sedley returned the embrace of Marian.

"You two girls are always kissing," cried Mr. Glendore smilingly, as he threw an arm round each. "When I was of the age of Reuben, I should have taken such a sight as a fair challenge, and deemed my gallantry called in question, unless I immediately accepted it. The young men of the present day are not much overburthened with modesty, and it is rather surprising, that since Reuben has become a soldier, he should keep by him any remains of such an old-fashioned commodity."

Reuben pretended not to hear this speech of his father, yet he appeared to profit by it; for never had Winifred Meredith experienced from him so much attention and gallantry as at this moment. Virginia sighed almost unconsciously; her eyes  
turned



turned on her own graceful form, reflected in the opposite mirror; and though she loved Winifred, yet she could not help feeling that Miss Meredith's was not a face or figure to divide with her the notice of Reuben Glendore. Again she sighed; her eyes fell on the happy, joyful countenance of his friend, who in a few minutes would become the husband of her amiable governess. Love, chastened by the purest esteem, was visible in every feature of a face which affection rendered handsome. Had Virginia ever beheld the same expression illumine that of Reuben? The ceremony began, and every light and trifling idea fled from the mind of Virginia.

## CHAPTER V

VIRGINIA, disappointed in the expectation she had formed of calling forth the admiration of Reuben, could not help betraying to Winifred her vexation when they retired to dress for the ball.

Winifred afforded her all the consolation in her power—"It was but this morning," said she, "that Alicia was telling me how happy your union with her brother would render all the family—how much she longed to have you with them the next winter in town, that she might introduce you to her acquaintance as the destined bride of Reuben."

"Such are the wishes of his sisters, I know," replied Virginia; "but to tell you a secret, Winifred, I have sometimes doubted whether Reuben's affection was  
not

not too tranquil for that of a lover; and since I have witnessed the tenderness which beams on the countenance of your sister's husband, I am the more convinced that my fears are just. Reuben is guided by his family in every thing; but I have, thank Heaven! the power of proving whether I am always to be wooed by proxy. This very night will give me an opportunity to try the extent of Reuben's attachment. But, hush! I think I hear the step of your aunt. I wonder who that letter came from which she received to-day, and which seemed to occasion her so much perplexity. Mr. Glendore is evidently in her confidence. Yet why should I wonder at what cannot concern me?"

"Come, children," said the old lady, as she entered, "are you not ready? the carriage is waiting to convey us to Meredith House.—Virginia, this is your first appearance in public. I have brought with me my jewel-box; select from it whatever ornaments you like best. There  
will

will be several people of fashion at Mr. Glendore's to-night, and I wish you to be seen to as much advantage as if you were a *lord's daughter*."

"Ah, madam!" replied Virginia, gravely, "you have started a painful subject."

"No matter," cried the old lady, interrupting her; "enjoy yourself this evening, my child; be as happy as the novelty of the scene will allow. To-morrow I have something of importance to disclose to you.—If you like these diamonds, wear them."

Virginia, however, modestly selected a pearl necklace and bracelets, with which she adorned her neck and arms; and placing in her bosom, which now throbbed with additional curiosity, a sprig of myrtle and geranium, she followed Mrs. Meredith and her niece to the carriage.

It was Virginia's first appearance in company. Hitherto Mrs. Meredith had restricted her from visiting at Mrs. Glendore's on those evenings when she had

parties. She was therefore only known to the neighbouring families by being seen at church. She now appeared to them with no envious veil to hide the blushing beauties of her face. Immediately a number of the young people crowded round to welcome her introduction among them.

“Remember, Virginia,” whispered Marian, “that you are engaged to dance with my brother.”

Virginia had, in truth, almost forgotten it. She was charmed with the kind manners of the Miss Lambtons, who, in particular, had expressed their satisfaction at her being allowed to make one in their future parties, and gave her a strong invitation to their house, in which they were seconded by their mother; while sir James Lambton, their eldest brother, a fine young man, just come of age, entreated so earnestly to become her partner; that Virginia was obliged to own her prior engagement. He then pleaded for the privilege of calling on her for the next dances,

dances, to which she assented, not a little pleased to be thus able to show Reuben, who had only noticed her by a familiar nod *en passant*, that she had gained so early the attention of sir James, who was esteemed one of the richest commoners in the county.

Nothing could certainly be more unfavourable to the development of Virginia's real character than the unbounded flattery which she this night received; it not only gave her just reason to believe all the partial fondness of the Miss Glendores, but it led her to be still more dissatisfied with the calm affection of the man whom she had been taught to look up to as the future partner of her life. The admiration which came from the eyes of sir James Lambton—his marked attentions, as well as those of his cousin, lord Ellesmere, did not in the least disconcert the ever-cheerful features of young Glendore; and Virginia, who had borne for some time the pointed raillery of sir James and his sisters

on the seeming carelessness of her future husband, and who felt inwardly piqued, thoughtlessly replied, that perhaps they had been misinformed as to the nature of her engagement.

The glow of pleasure which instantly overspread the face of sir James, as he emphatically pronounced—"I wish to Heaven I may!" flattered the vanity of Virginia, and encouraged her to try that night the extent of a tenderness of which she had heard so much. She accordingly excused herself from going down every dance, that she might converse with the Miss Lambtons, who showed her nearly as much attention as sir James. The latter, of course, took every opportunity of being near her, and of pouring into her ear the most delicate, and consequently the most dangerous adulation.

Reuben passed and repassed where they were seated; he stopped once or twice, when addressed by the Miss Lambtons—his countenance was the same as usual, yet  
there

there was a slight difference in the tone of his voice, as he spoke to Virginia; and she thought that he cast on her a reproachful look, as he said—"Do you not mean to dance after supper, Virginia?"

"I do not know," said she, turning aside her head.

"Pardon me," cried Miss Lambton; "you forget, my dear Miss Sedley, that you are engaged to my brother."

"True," replied Virginia, confusedly; "but I do not mean to dance after that."

Sir James, who had been absent, now advanced with some refreshment for Virginia. Reuben conversed with him for a few minutes, without discovering any symptom that could betray the feelings of an offended lover; on the contrary, he inquired if he could execute any commission for him in town, where he was going the next day.

Virginia could not avoid testifying some surprise at the suddenness of his journey. She knew he was obliged to be in London



that week; but what could have occurred to hasten his departure? what could have changed his mind since yesterday? She felt uneasy; a momentary thoughtfulness clouded the serenity of her brow; it was remarked by sir James. Virginia smiled, and allowed him to lead her to the supper-room. Here she had to encounter, for the first time, the altered glances of those she loved. 'The eyes of Juliana were bent on her with a scrutinizing look that made the blood recede from her cheek; turning, she encountered those of Alicia; their sparkling anger recalled her faded colour, and with it a portion of her natural haughtiness—"Am I to be led, like Reuben, for ever in leading-strings?" thought Virginia, her proud heart swelling at the marked displeasure of Alicia. The voice of Marian, who had taken a seat beside her friend, instantly disarmed the resentment which she felt towards her sister. Raising her eyes with timidity, she met those of her beloved Marian, which were suffused with tears—

tears—tears such as angels shed on beholding the weaknesses of human nature.—“I have done wrong,” was the immediate conviction of Virginia; and the flattery of sir James lost its power to charm for the remainder of the night.

The next morning, after the breakfast had been removed, Mrs. Meredith desired Virginia and Winifred to bring their work-baskets into her chamber. They were no sooner seated than the old lady, addressing herself to Virginia, said—“My dear girl, I have that to communicate, which, however it may shock your feelings as a daughter, I hope to see you bear like a Christian, remembering that we are all mortal.”

Virginia dropped the work she had just taken; her countenance was pale, and her form trembled.

Mrs. Meredith took her hand, and drawing her affectionately towards her, continued—“I was unwilling to damp the pleasure of yesterday, or deprive you of the

night's amusement, by informing you of the contents of a letter I had received from your father's excutor."

"Ah, my God!" exclaimed Virginia, bursting into tears, "my father, then, is no more! He is dead—and never shall I be able to assure him of the love and duty which my heart has ever borne towards him!"

Winifred flung her arms round the neck of her weeping friend, while her aunt, in the most soothing accents, besought her to moderate her grief.—"My dearest Virginia," said the old lady, in a voice sweetly persuasive, the benevolent tones of which spoke comfort to the oppressed heart of her young charge, "this proof of amiable sensibility reflects on you the highest credit. Yet check the violence of your feelings, my love, and listen to what I have to disclose to you."

"Ah, madam!" replied Virginia, sobbing, "I will endeavour to be obedient; but indeed you know not how dearly I  
had

had anticipated the rapture of being pressed to the bosom of my father—of hearing him explain the singular reason that had prevented his writing to me—and why I was denied the sacred privilege of testifying my filial affection in the only way which his absence had allowed me.”

Mrs. Meredith was affected by the distress of the child she had reared from infancy, and at *that moment*, had wealth been requisite to allay the anguish of Virginia, she would have parted with some of her hoarded treasure for that purpose. Clearing her voice, she said—“ My dear girl, had your father lived, it is not likely that your affectionate wishes would ever have been gratified. The heart of your father was prejudiced against you from your birth. By his orders, Virginia, you were taught to believe that your parent was abroad—that an immense distance divided you, while, in reality, he has never been out of England.”

Virginia started from the shoulder of

Winifred in terrified amaze; she pressed the hands of Mrs. Meredith to her bosom—she scarce seemed to breathe; at length she exclaimed—“ My father in England, and refuse to see me! Is it possible that for so many years the heart of a parent could be steeled against the voice of nature! Gracious Heaven! what prejudice, what aversion, could he feel for an innocent and unoffending infant? Say, my dear madam, was I not given to your care when I was only two years old?”

“ Yes, my Virginia; at that tender age you unfortunately lost your mother. I had not the pleasure of being personally known to either of your parents; but humanity made me call on your father to condole with his misfortune, and to propose to take you under my protection. My offer was accepted with gratitude. I received you into my family under certain restrictions, and a promise which I have faithfully kept, but which I now consider myself as free from, namely, that I should

should bring you up in total ignorance of your family connexions, nor ever drop a hint which could lead you to suppose yourself otherwise than what you seemed. All my applications to entice your father to visit us have been vain; he has declined every invitation, though I never presumed to notice or condemn the injustice of his conduct towards you. Little, however, did I suspect that, in his last moments, he would leave to the world so sad a proof of wanton cruelty—of cold, unnatural resentment! You have wept, my dear Virginia, for one who never felt for you the common feelings of a parent—who abandoned you to the protection of a stranger, for such I was to him—and who dying felt no wish to atone for his injustice, nor even mentioned you in his will. The two hundred a-year which he allowed for your maintenance is left in my name; but I am in hopes that your brother, to whom the whole of his property devolves, will,

as soon as he comes of age, provide for you as he ought to do."

"And have I then a brother?" inquired Virginia mournfully; "and will he, do you think, acknowledge me?"

"From the character of the young lord de Morville," replied Mrs. Meredith, "I have every reason to expect that he will gladly avail himself of the opportunity of owning you as his sister. I mean to write to him to-day, after I have consulted again with Mr. Glendore. Thus you see, Virginia, good may spring out of evil; you have lost a father who disowned you—you may gain a brother who may be proud to claim you as a relation, and to love you as such. Henceforward, Winifred, you will remember that your friend, and my adopted child, is the daughter of an earl—let her be called in future by her title. The death of lord de Morville absolves me from my promise of secrecy." She then embraced Virginia, telling her that she was going to call on Mr. Glendore.

"Let

“ Let me be the first, my sweet friend,” said Winifred, “ to address you as lady Virginia Sedley, and to congratulate you upon the discovery of your rank. Dry your tears; to sorrow for the death of an unnatural parent is only a waste of time. The father who could banish from his presence, and estrange from his affections, an innocent and helpless child, who could voluntarily deprive himself of her filial attentions, is not worthy of her filial tears.”

“ Alas, Winifred! but must not some *cause* exist to give birth to sentiments so uncongenial with the tender feelings of a parent? What avails the empty title of lady, when my father has cut me off from enjoying it?”

“ Ah, but you forget the *vast importance* which *some* people attach to the sound of ‘ her ladyship.’ I expect every minute that you will be visited by Mrs. Glendore, who, dropping one of her lowest courtesies, will most condescendingly inquire after the health of the right honourable lady Virginia



ginia Sedley. Even the learned Juliana and the witty Alicia will be gratified to announce to their friends, that the intended bride of their brother is sister to an earl."

In this instance, however, Winifred was wrong in her calculation of Mrs. Glendore's humility. At first the discovery of Virginia's rank had its due effect; but when she learnt that lord de Morville had not named her in his will, and that all her hopes of fortune must rest on the honour of her brother, she secretly resolved that her son should never unite himself to a titled beggar; and in the course of Mrs. Meredith's visit her mind was as completely made up as if she had dwelt on the subject for months.

Miss Glendore and Marian, though displeased at the conduct of Virginia at the dance, walked to the cottage, to witness what effect her unexpected exaltation would have on her mind, which was naturally high and aspiring, and, if necessary,  
to

to condole with her on the death of her father. They found her more deeply affected by the strange unkindness of him who gave her being, than elated by the discovery of his rank. The sensibility and good sense which she displayed—the gratitude she likewise testified at their friendly visit, soon made the sisters forget the vanity and weakness of the preceding evening, and they quitted her with every semblance of their usual affection.

Alicia had remained at home, by the desire of her mother, who, as soon as Mrs. Meredith had followed Mr. Glendore to his study, in order to consult with him on the propriety of addressing a letter to lord de Morville, immediately disclosed to her favourite daughter the revolution which had taken place in her sentiments.

Alicia, offended by the willingness with which Virginia had received the homage of sir James Lambton, as well as by the admiration her first appearance had excited, and feeling envious at the superiority, high birth,

birth, and a title, would now give to her lovely friend, yielded the more readily to the ungenerous suggestions of her mother, who counselled her to seek an opportunity to call forth the hasty spirit of Virginia, and yet make the quarrel appear as if originating with her ladyship.

“This will easily be effected,” said Mrs. Glendore. “The warm temper of Virginia will not brook the slightest semblance of neglect from us, now that she has lost all claim to the fortune which Mrs. Meredith so improperly led me to believe would one day be her own. That old creature ought, in justice, to make Virginia her heiress; but she would die sooner than part with a guinea while living, and it is a bad speculation to wait for dead men’s shoes.”

Had not Virginia’s beauty called forth too much praise from the known admirers of the Miss Glendores, Alicia would probably have shrunk with horror from the cold and mercenary advice of her mother; but

but Virginia promised to be a rival of no despicable kind, and Alicia could not bear to yield to any one but to a sister.

Notwithstanding the unfatherly conduct of lord de Morville, his daughter remained close in the house until her mourning was finished; she then paid her first visit to church, and from thence to Mrs. Glendore, who had been *confined* by a *cold* ever since the night of the ball.

Virginia perceived a difference in her looks and manner the moment she addressed her, and Winifred could scarce believe what she saw. Was it possible that Mrs. Glendore could treat with indifference the right honourable lady Virginia Sedley?

The wonder was soon, however, at an end, when Mrs. Glendore began to console with Virginia on the serious calamity which had befallen her in not being named in the will of her father—"He must have been a bad man indeed," said she, "who could forget to make a suitable provision for his child. In what a deplorable situation

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tion has he left you, without a shilling to keep up your consequence! and what is to become of you, God knows, for I do not think Mrs. Meredith will provide for you, at least while she is living. I really feel very much on your account, Virginia. But, my dear girl, do not suffer yourself to be misled by the flattery of sir James Lambton; he is a young man, and a very extravagant one; when he danced with you, he supposed, as did every one present, that you were in expectation of a good fortune. The discovery of your rank is against your settling well in life, as few men will choose to take a titled wife without a shilling to support that title."

Mortified pride, wounded affection, and a just sense of the intended insult, kept Virginia silent.

"I speak to you as I would were you my own daughter," continued Mrs. Glendore. "It is very natural that so young a girl should feel herself elated at discovering that her father was a nobleman of high

high rank; but without a fortune, Virginia, the discovery is only an evil; it may render you proud and ambitious, which will create you many enemies, and prevent your real friends from affording you that assistance they would otherwise do."

"The discovery of my rank, madam," replied Virginia, haughtily, "is a circumstance which seems likely to have so much influence on my future happiness, that I do not consider it in the light that you do. Had I continued in ignorance of it, and misled by the hopes of Mrs. Meredith of one day being possessed of fortune, you would have been spared the painful task of anticipating my errors and my disgrace, and I should have lost a lesson which I hope will sink too deeply into my mind ever to be forgotten. Yet trust me, madam, that I do not regret my poverty, since it will be the means of enabling me to discern a real friend from a pretended one."

"You

“ You are warm, Virginia,” said Alicia; “ my mother could only advise you for your good.”

“ I am sensible of her *kind intentions*,” replied Virginia, endeavouring to check the starting tear. “ Among all my faults, I trust ingratitude will never be numbered.”

“ I hope not,” said Mrs. Glendore sharply; “ but you must try, Virginia, to conquer that hastiness of temper which leads you to be offended at the gentlest reproof. Were I not concerned for your welfare, and desirous of seeing you do well in the world, I should not take the trouble to caution you against those failings which will make you unhappy.”

Virginia rose to depart, followed by Winifred and Marian Glendore.—“ Dearest Virginia!” cried the latter, throwing her arms round the neck of her indignant friend; “ dearest Virginia! why did you fan the flame already kindled in the bosom of my mother? You know the oddities  
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of her nature, and that she seldom or ever forgives a fault, even in her children; why then did you answer her so proudly, my best-loved Virginia?"

The tears of Marian disarmed the anger of her friend.—“ I am ignorant of my crime,” she replied; “ unless, as I suspect, it is the loss of fortune. Oh Marian! my beloved Marian! I am not so blind but that I can see the alteration which has taken place in the manners of your mother and of Alicia. The loss of fortune, nay the loss of your brother’s love, would be trifling, compared to the loss of your affection.”

Marian pressed her fondly to her bosom —“ Friend of my soul,” she exclaimed, mingling her tears with those of Virginia, “ do not anticipate an event wholly impossible! My affection for you can never diminish. Though all my family, though all the world, were against you, still would my love remain strong and unchangeable. Will you bear, Virginia, to hear unpleas-  
ing



ing truths from my lips—will you listen to them, and not give way to the impatience of your temper?”

“ Yes, Marian, from *you* I can bear any thing.”

“ Well, then, dearest Virginia, let us turn into this shrubbery. You do not mind Winifred Meredith, I know; her only fault is, that she suffers her affection for you to mislead her judgment, which makes her yield even to your failings.”

“ They are of so amiable a nature,” said Winifred, “ that I scarce wish them to be eradicated.”

Marian shook her head.—“ The happiness of Virginia is too sacred to be trifled with,” replied she; “ it is dearer to me than my own. Fondly as I love her, I cannot help wishing that she was more perfect; for is not the peace of my brother entwined with hers?”

“ Whatever it might *once* have been,” said Virginia, in a faltering voice, “ it is so no longer, Marian. The loss of fortune  
has

has changed the wishes of your mother. ‘ Few men will choose to take a titled wife without a shilling to support that title;’ those were her words; their meaning is but too obvious. I have lost the charm which alone induced your mother to wish me to become her daughter.”

“ You are angry, Virginia, and therefore unjust. My mother’s altered conduct does not proceed from the deprivation of your fortune, but from the natural fear of a parent, lest the happiness of a beloved son should be confided to the care of one who prized the unmeaning gallantry of a stranger more than the steady attentions of an acknowledged lover. To be candid with you, my dear Virginia, even I, who am willing to make every allowance for the vanity of a beautiful girl like yourself, could not excuse your total neglect of my brother. I know that Reuben felt it; his hastening his journey to town was a proof of his secret displeasure. Juliana, who, you know, is one of the best and most considerate

siderate of human beings, was deeply hurt by your thoughtlessness; and I——But I see that you are offended, Virginia; if I loved you less, I would not hazard your anger.”

“I cannot comprehend that affection,” said Virginia, “which seeks to give pain to the object it professes to love. Of *your* attachment, my Marian, I do not doubt; yet if I am a creature so prone to err, how can you, who are far my superior in virtues, continue to love one so frail?”

“Because,” replied Marian, “I have known you from a child; I have studied your character, and am convinced that you possess a heart and mind capable of every thing that is good and great. Were you less subject to passion, less governed by the impulse of the moment, you would be one of the most perfect of your sex.”

“Do you think, Marian, that Reuben really felt what you call my neglect of him? I will confess to you that it proceeded from a wish to try the extent of his affection,

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tion, from a desire to prove whether his sentiments were his own, or those of his family."

"I will not deceive you, my dear Virginia. Reuben feels himself much hurt by your conduct, and the encouragement you gave to sir James Lambton. Yet he wishes not to fetter your inclinations. A further knowledge of the world may only serve to prove to you the value of my brother's heart, and teach you to know your own."

They were now within sight of the cottage; Marian again embraced her friend, and promised to spend the evening with her. The spirit of Virginia was too sorely hurt by the altered manner of Mrs. Glendore and Alicia to conceal from Mrs. Meredith her internal vexation. She had not been accustomed to dissemble her feelings, and in the present instance she found it impossible.

Mrs. Meredith knew, full as well as Mrs. Glendore, the value of money, yet

she never felt that the want of it lessened the worth of a deserving object. Virginia was the child of her adoption; she loved her tenderly, she even frequently deviated from her rules of economy to favour her amusements, and she now heard with chagrin the complaint of her favourite, who seemed tortured by wounded pride and affection, far more than by the loss of fortune. She counselled her, however, to restrain her grief, as well as her indignation, and to wait patiently the reply of her brother to the letter which she had sent.

“Who knows,” said the old lady, “but that the heart of his lordship may be favourably inclined towards you? If so, what have you to fear? his countenance and protection will put all to rights again.”

“Ah, madam! I only ask for the affection of my brother. I envy him not the wealth he may possess by my disinheritance; and if, in the generosity of his heart, he wishes to make amends for the unkindness of my father, my gratitude to  
him

him will be eternal. But never can I forget the cutting indifference of Mrs. Glendore, or the evident alarm she is under, lest a titled beggar should become her daughter."

"Nay," replied Mrs. Meredith, "for the matter of that, Virginia, it may not be the pleasure of lord de Morville that his sister should bestow her hand on the son of Mrs. Glendore. The young man is very amiable, it is true, but he has his fortune to make, and his lordship may choose to dispose of you otherwise. Mrs. Glendore, therefore, had no occasion to drop any hints on the subject—it was for lord de Morville, not her, to break off the match, if necessary."

A fortnight elapsed before the arrival of the anxiously-expected letter; but when it came, it well repaid the uncasiness of Virginia. Lord de Morville was from home when Mrs. Meredith addressed him, which had occasioned the delay of his reply. It was couched in the hand-

somest terms. He thanked her for the maternal protection she had afforded his sister; lamented the fatal prejudice of his father, which had occasioned their separation; and promised to pay her a visit, as soon as he could free himself from an engagement which he had made with a travelling friend. He wrote also to Virginia. His style was affectionate; he anticipated the happiness he should enjoy in recovering the society of so dear a relative, expressed his ardent wishes to behold her, and assured her that he was ready at all times to promote her interest and welfare.

What more could Virginia desire from a brother to whom she was a perfect stranger? Yet Virginia felt that, had she been in lord de Morville's place, no travelling engagement would have withheld her from personally expressing her sentiments. She reperused the letter, and tried to content herself with its professions.

She continued to visit, as usual, at the Glendores; but this was not done without

out considerable pain. Accustomed to receive from them the warmest demonstrations of affection, she could not hear, without a sigh, that all their thoughts were employed by the expected arrival of the late governor Herbert's family. Nothing else was talked of but their immense riches, and the importance such a connexion would give to themselves. Even Marian seemed to look forward to their acquaintance with impatience, and, as Virginia thought, to lessen in her usual attentions towards herself. The subject, however, of the ball, and the consequent reproof of Mrs. Glendore, were mentioned no more; but Virginia's high spirit had not forgotten the angry looks of Alicia, or the insulting hints of her mother. From Mr. Glendore she continued to receive every mark of paternal kindness, but he had no voice in the domestic affairs of his family. Of Reuben she scarce heard any thing. All but his father and Marian appeared purposely to avoid mentioning his name—



a circumstance which continued to keep alive the pride of Virginia, and to lay the foundation of her future misconduct.

Her rank was no sooner known than the cottage was crowded by the neighbouring families, some of whom were drawn thither by the magic of her title, others by the charms of her person. Among the latter number were the Lambtons.

Sir James was a man of large fortune and great connexions; he was also his own master. The beauty of Virginia had pleased his taste; her vivacity and spirit still more; and her being portionless was, to him, a matter of small consequence; yet his esteem for Reuben Glendore withheld him from making any serious advances. He, however, made his mother and sisters call frequently at the cottage; and as their invitations were pressing, Mrs. Meredith could do no less than return their visits—of course, Virginia and Winifred accompanied her.

Sir

Sir James Lambton had been one among the number of Alicia's dangles; it might indeed have been said, that if any preference was shown, it was to him. Alicia could therefore but very ill brook any alteration in the attentions of sir James in favour of Virginia; and though, at heart, he was indifferent to her, and her mind seriously disposed towards making a conquest of Mr. Herbert, still sir James had once been her acknowledged admirer, and she could not forgive Virginia for being the occasion of any remissness on his part. Glad of an excuse to find fault with her, she made her brother the pretext of a coolness which Virginia, though conscious of having acted weakly, still felt that she did not deserve. Almost sick of the name of Herbert, which was now the constant theme of conversation at Meredith House, Virginia was not sorry when the letter arrived which called Mr. and Mrs. Glendore, with their daughter Alicia, to London, in order to prepare every thing

for the reception of the late governor's family.

## CHAPTER VI.

ALICIA had taken care to send her sisters an early description of the Herberts. She drew their characters according to her own wishes. Mrs. Herbert she esteemed, Dorinda she admired, but Arthur—"Oh, he was more than painting could express, or youthful poets fancy when they love." In short, he was not only a model of manly beauty, but possessed so rich a mind, so delicate a taste, so sweet a temper, united to manners dangerously soft and persuasive, that Alicia pronounced him the most finished of God's creatures. The curiosity, therefore, of Miss Glendore and Marian was considerably excited to behold the man who had called forth such unqualified

unqualified praise from their sister. He came, and even the sober and sedate Juliana thought that the vivid picture drawn by Alicia was not too flattering; while the heart of Marian acknowledged that she had seen but *one* who could dispute with Mr. Herbert the palm of personal attractions.

Arthur was enchanted with the sisters of his friend, with their place of abode, and all that concerned them. If the fine figure and striking features of Alicia had called forth his praise, how much more was he inclined to admire the regular beauty of Juliana, the graceful ease of Marian, and the sweet and tender expression of her heavenly blue eyes! Only once had he witnessed any which could bear to be compared with hers. For an hour or two the taste of Arthur fluctuated between the sisters; his heart, however, decided in favour of Marian. It seemed as if it could fearlessly confide to her its most secret feelings; and had not an unknown

form crossed his mind, whose magic influence he blushed to own even to himself, Marian Glendore would have effected, in one evening, what Alicia could not have accomplished in months.

The next morning, Marian, who was still unwell, proposed sending a note to Mrs. Meredith, to invite her and her family to spend the day with them.

"Herbert and I will call there," said Reuben; "we are going to take a stroll, and I want, if possible, to show him the old quiz in all her glory."

"You monkey!" cried Marian, "how can you be so cruel as to wish your friend's mind to be prejudiced against Mrs. Meredith by a discovery of her singular oddities? Go, however; I am pleased, Reuben, that you proposed it. Give my love to Virginia; I would accompany you, but that my cold is worse."

Although the walk was short, yet Reuben contrived to give Herbert so laughable, yet so true a sketch of Mrs. Meredith's

dith's singularities, that the wit and humour he displayed on the occasion had almost conquered the unaccountable agitation of body and mind which Arthur at first felt on leaving Meredith House. Reuben conducted him to the back of the cottage, by a lane which was only divided from the garden by a hedge of hawthorn and wild roses. Peeping through a small aperture, he discovered, to his great joy, the object of his visit, very busily employed in weeding the walk next to them; assisted by her niece and two young female servants. The old lady had got on her black quilted petticoat, a short bedgown, her worn-out beaver bonnet, with no cap, and the stocking legs drawn on her arms, to keep off the heat of the sun.

Notwithstanding the meanness of her appearance, there was something about the expression of her countenance which found its way to the heart of Herbert.

“By Heaven!” cried Reuben, as he passed on to the front of the cottage, “if

ever I knew so strange a being! Would you credit that she is in possession of a clear estate of eight thousand a-year, and yet lives and dresses in that beggarly manner?"

"She must be an oddity, most certainly," replied Herbert; "but her features are strongly marked by a benevolence which ill accords with her penuriousness of living."

"I believe the old quiz can be charitable sometimes," said Reuben; "and, indeed, I know that she is capable of doing a kind action. She is also a most entertaining companion; but she is so confoundedly stingy, that I verily think, if it was not for the fear of having it made public, she would allowance her household to two meals a-day."

They now approached the front of the cottage, by a small lawn tastefully ornamented with a variety of flowers. Reuben, with the familiarity of a long acquaintance, opened the glass-door, opposite

site

site to which was a sitting-room, where Virginia was practising. No sooner had the tones of her voice met the ear of Herbert than he felt a deadly sickness steal over him. His limbs trembled, and he knew that he was pale. Reuben paused to listen to the following stanza, sung in a tremulous but sweet voice :—

With thee were the dreams of my earliest love,  
 Every thought of my reason was thine ;  
 In my last humble prayer to the Spirit above,  
 Thy name shall be mingled with mine.

Oh, bless'd are the lovers and friends who shall live  
 The days of thy glory to see !  
 But the next dearest blessing that Heav'n can give  
 Is the pride of thus dying for thee."

A mingled emotion of hope and fear for a moment agitated the bosom of Reuben. Recollecting his mother's advice, and hearing a movement within the chamber, he stepped forward, followed by Arthur. Virginia uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, as she hastened to  
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give her hand to Reuben, who pressed it affectionately, and then turning towards his friend, introduced him to lady Virginia Sedley.

It was well for the safety of Herbert's secret that a fourth person was not present, to witness his excessive embarrassment on discovering, in the young and lovely female before him, the original of the miniature confided to him by his father. Fortunately for him, the visit of Reuben was a short one. He only waited to have his invitation accepted by Mrs. Meredith, who sent an apology for not being able to receive them in person.

The first part of their walk was a silent one; Reuben was thoughtful, and Herbert was actually unwell. The former, however, was incapable of long remaining serious. He attempted to launch out in his usual flow of humour, but, on Arthur's making some inquiry concerning the family of Virginia, his heart got the better of his head, and he gave him a brief  
account

account of all that he knew concerning her. The feelings of Herbert underwent a variety of changes during the short and hurried narrative of his friend; yet, unconscious that any engagement had once subsisted between him and Virginia, he noticed not the alteration in his manner, or the occasional pensiveness which at moments damped the ever-lively expression of his features.

Both returned out of spirits to Meredith House. Reuben, however, rallied his to meet the inquiring looks of his sisters, while Herbert retired to his chamber, to muse on the strange fatality which had thus unexpectedly conducted him to the very spot which contained the object of his father's solicitude.

If the curiosity of Arthur had been excited by the discovery of his parent's dying bequest, it was now raised to the most painful height, on finding that the being so solemnly and tenderly entrusted to his honour was the neglected and disinherited daughter

daughter of the late earl de Morville; not, as he had once imagined she might be, in the wane of her charms, but glowing with the bright bloom of youth, health, and beauty. The unnatural conduct of her father too plainly betrayed that the fears of his own were realized. Yet *what* could have occasioned such cruel animosity towards a creature formed to inspire the gentlest emotions, the softest affections?

The dinner-bell now rang, and Herbert descending to the dining-parlour, was introduced to Mrs. Meredith and her niece; though, had it not been for the same benevolence of countenance, he would not have recognised, in the well-dressed person before him, the old garden-woman of the morning.

This singular character now appeared to have a strong claim upon the politeness and attention of Arthur. Reuben had represented her as having performed for Virginia the duties of a mother, and fully supplied the place of a tender parent to that  
interesting

interesting girl—to her for whom his own father had confessed so warm a regard. Was it then unnatural that the compassionate heart of the son should induce him to draw his chair close to that of her protector, to answer with willingness the many questions of garrulous old age, and to listen with respectful silence to all she said? Such conduct could not fail of securing the good opinion of Mrs. Meredith, who, when the ladies had retired, could hardly talk of any thing else but the engaging manners of Mr. Herbert.

Virginia's mind was occupied by a far different subject. The return of Glendore, and the tenderness which beamed in his eyes on their first meeting after the discovery of her rank, had awakened a train of pleasing reflections, connected with the days of happy childhood, when vanity and folly were only known to her by name. From this dream of innocent delight, she was awakened by Juliana, who cagerly questioned her as to her opinion

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nion of Mr. Herbert. Virginia replied that she should be better able to form a judgment after she had seen more of him.

“You are not apt to be so tardy in forming your judgments,” said Miss Glendore, while a smile of irony discomposed the beauty of her features. “I should have thought that it required no hesitation to decide on the perfect symmetry of Mr. Herbert’s form, or the exquisite beauty of his countenance.”

“Perhaps,” interrupted the graceful Marian, “our dear friend was too deeply absorbed by an object of less personal endowments, but of equal mental amiabilities.”

Virginia sighed, and cast a look of grateful thanks on Marian, while Juliana frowningly desired her sister to take her seat at the piano; and then, turning to Mrs. Meredith, read that part of Alicia’s last letter which warmly expatiated on the innumerable accomplishments and virtues of Miss Herbert.

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“ In a few days we expect to be with you,” said Alicia; “ you will then become known to one of the most amiable of human beings. You will find her possessed of a mind soaring above the petty artifices of her sex, and disdaining to have recourse to those little weaknesses which women of more beauty, but less greatness of soul, too frequently resort to as a trial of their power. In short, Juliana, Dorinda is the being I have so long imaged to myself as worthy to become your friend. Her mother-in-law is equally attractive, though she is of a different cast of character; yet it is impossible not to love her, if you have once passed an hour in her society.”

“ Upon my word,” said Mrs. Meredith, with a smile full of meaning, “ I think Miss Alicia promises rather too much on so short a knowledge of Miss Herbert. However, it is to be hoped that she will answer her expectations.”

Herbert and Glendore now entered. The former placed himself between Mrs. Meredith

Meredith and Miss Glendore, while Reuben carelessly threw himself on a couch by the side of Virginia. Casting a glance towards Juliana, he saw that she was too much engaged in conversation with his handsome friend to watch *his* movements, and the eyes of Marian beamed with encouragement.

“Have you been well, Virginia, since I last saw you?” said Reuben. “I forgot to congratulate you this morning upon your accession to a title; but you know that I am a sad thoughtless fellow, and it is ten to one if I ever remember to address you by the appellation of *lady*. Virginia and lady Virginia Sedley seem to me to be two distinct beings, and to excite also distinct feelings.”

“You are not singular in your opinion,” she replied, sighing with bitterness of spirit. “I speak from experience. Mrs. Meredith has often told me that the great have their share of human ills, and I was far happier when I thought myself the child  
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of Mr. Sedley, than I now am as the sister of lord de Morville." She paused, and looking fearfully in his face, said, with a faltering accent—"Yet surely, as no disgrace can be attached to the discovery of my real situation, and as poverty is a misfortune, not a crime, I hope that I shall still retain, as friends, some of those dear companions of my youth, nor live to witness their gradual desertion, because my father's heart was prejudiced against me from my infancy."

"The loss of fortune can only the more endear you, Virginia, to the heart of a friend," replied Glendore, playing with his watch to conceal the real state of his feelings. "Here comes Marian to vouch for the truth of my assertion."

The delicacy as well as the pride of Virginia took the alarm. Her eyes met those of Reuben; they seemed to say—"And is Marian the only one of your family capable of proving the truth of your assertion?"

He felt the blush of shame tinge his cheek,



cheek, and gladly availed himself of the approach of his sister to give up to her his seat, taking that at the instrument which she had just vacated.

“Dearest Virginia,” cried Marian, “does not my brother look handsome to-night? I thought also that he appeared happier than he has done for some time. Oh that I dared hope yet to see my long-cherished wishes realized !”

Virginia affectionately pressed her hand. A tear that would not be restrained fell on her glowing cheek. Ashamed at betraying what she considered a weakness, after what had fallen from the lips of Mrs. Glendore, she assumed a gaiety she did not feel, and forcing a smile, said laughingly—“ You wish me married and happy ; but few men, you know, will take a portionless beggar for their wife. Thus destined for an old maid, my Marian, I must try to be happy and single—to make, in short, a virtue of necessity.”

“ You play well, Glendore,” said Herbert ;

bert; “there you have the superiority over me. Though fond of the science, I am no performer. Perhaps lady Virginia will have the goodness to accompany you.”

“Do, my dear friend,” whispered Marian.

Virginia rose. She felt the hand of Arthur tremble as he conducted her to the instrument. Instinctively raising her eyes, she met his; the expression soothed and tranquillized her feelings, and she could not help wishing that such might be the language of her brother’s when they first met. Reuben had already selected the music, and called to Marian to take part in the following beautiful trio:—

“To sigh, yet feel no pain;  
 To weep, yet scarce know why;  
 To sport an hour with beauty’s chain,  
 Then throw it idly by;  
 To kneel at many a shrine,  
 Yet lay the heart on none;  
 To think all other charms divine,  
 But those we just have won:

## 144 ORIGINAL OF THE MINIATURE.

This is love—careless love,  
Such as kindleth hearts that rove.  
To keep one sacred flame,  
Through life, unchill'd, unmov'd;  
To love, in wintry age, the same  
That first in youth we lov'd;  
To feel that we adore  
To such refin'd excess,  
That though the heart would break with *more*,  
We could not love with *less*:  
This is love—faithful love,  
Such as saints might feel above."

Herbert was so charmed with the performance, as well as by the composition, that he entreated to hear it again. After they had complied with his request, he said, with evident satisfaction—"How delighted my dear mother will be with such enchanting harmony! She is uncommonly fond of music, and my sister, who plays well, received her only instructions from her. Will you not contribute, Miss Glendore, to increase the pleasure I already feel?"

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Since it appeared to be held in such high estimation by Herbert, Juliana for the first time felt mortified at owning that she had never made music her study. Virginia now, by the desire of Reuben, took his place, yet not without some apprehension lest she should fall short of Mr. Herbert's expectation. Her first attempt was in a duet with Winifred Meredith; then by degrees gaining courage, she played and sung unaccompanied. Reuben was equally as partial as herself to music. He had chosen her songs, and listened to them with mute attention, while Herbert stood rapt in deep meditation, his arms folded, and his fine blue eyes bent on the ground.

"What a model for a sculptor!" whispered Juliana to her sister. "Never before have I witnessed in one form such an assemblage of graces! Should Alicia have been so fortunate as to gain his affections, she may be considered as the happiest of women."

What would Juliana have said, could

she but have taken a peep into that head whose symmetry she so much admired—could she have witnessed the changeful movements of that heart, the possession of which even the grave and learned Juliana deemed invaluable, and which at that moment was agitated by feelings diametrically opposite to her wishes? Juliana was amiable, gentle, and affectionate. She loved Virginia, notwithstanding the weakness she had displayed; but her love was cold when compared to that of Marian, and she found it difficult to excuse an error in one from whom her imagination had banished every fault. She was indignant at the cruel conduct of lord de Morville, and sincerely pitied the painful situation in which it had placed his unoffending child: but pity from one whom Virginia had long regarded as a sister was a sentiment of too cold a nature; it was adding insult to injury—it was what a disposition like hers could not tolerate.

Juliana

Juliana hoped to see the day, when, purified by experience, the virtues of Virginia would still rise superior to that fatal vanity which she herself had been instrumental in creating, in common with all her family, with the exception of Reuben. Yet Juliana was now become unwilling to commit the happiness of his life to the prudence of her once-idolized friend; and had it been possible for her to have foreseen that the rejected and condemned Virginia would, to the mind of Herbert, be an object of the most sacred tenderness, as well as of the first importance, even the mild and dovelike Juliana Glendore would in all probability have betrayed a share of that irritability, that infirmity of noble minds, which she so severely condemned in others.

Virginia was unconscious of the interest she had excited in the bosom of Mr. Herbert, though she could not fail to observe, that whenever her eyes accidentally met his, they preserved one unvaried expres-

sion of solicitous tenderness; they seemed to dwell on her features as if anxious to trace out a resemblance, probably to some lady to whom he might be attached, or perhaps to a deceased friend. From whatever cause it arose, Virginia could not be offended. It was not the bold stare of fashionable admiration, nor the ardent gaze of an adoring lover—it expressed more of the watchful kindness of a relation; and the heart of Virginia, softened as it was by the sudden return of Reuben, by the pressure of his hand, and the affectionate though hurried tones of his voice, felt no inclination to trifle with another, or to yield to that vanity of mind which had already given her best friends an excuse to pass on the weakness of a night the severest censure.

Mrs. Meredith, who had always in view her own interest, and who had got a project in her head by which it might be forwarded, as well as from a real partiality for Arthur, made them promise to dine with her  
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the next day. She then rose to depart, having first accepted of the arm of her young favourite, who, from some private reasons, seemed just as much pleased with the old lady as she was with him. Marian was not suffered to stir out in the damp of the evening, and Juliana, for the first time, remained her unwilling companion.

Reuben offered his arm to Virginia and Winifred; the latter, however, had no sooner quitted the house than she left them, under pretence of supporting her aunt, and Reuben found himself alone with Virginia. He became embarrassed. He longed to address her in words congenial to his real feelings; but the remembrance of the indifference with which she had treated him at the ball, joined to the dreaded displeasure of his mother, and the reproaches of his sisters, chained his tongue.

The fineness of the night, the clearness of the sky, studded with innumerable stars, and rendered still more beautiful by the mild lustre of the rising moon—the vil-



lage church, the distant woods, the lofty hill, on whose towering summit stood the ancient seat of the Lambtons, were severally noticed by Reuben as they became illumined by its rays. The last, however, seemed to fix his attention, and he gained courage to inquire if her opinion remained the same respecting that family?

“ I have been informed,” said he, “ that you visit there very frequently. Sir James is in London, I believe?”

“ Your informer should have been more correct in his statements,” replied Virginia, haughtily. “ Sir James and his eldest sister are on a visit to the father of lord Ellesmere, where they are to remain for some time.”

“ It surprised me much, I confess,” said he, “ when I heard of his absence. He appeared so completely captivated, Virginia, at the dance, that I expected every week to learn that he had formally proposed himself, been accepted, and so forth.”

“ Indeed !

“Indeed! you forget, Reuben, or perhaps may not have been *informed*, that ‘few men will choose to take a titled wife without a shilling to support that title;’ and yet your informer might have been excused for quoting the words of your mother.”

“My mother!” hastily exclaimed Reuben, off his guard; “and is it true, Virginia, that my mother made use of such ungenerous expressions?”

“I am not in the habit of uttering falsehoods, Reuben.”

“Dearest Virginia, pardon me; but I was unwilling to suppose that my mother, with all her eccentricities, could breathe a sentiment so unworthy of herself. I know her prejudices are strong—her dislikes eternal; but you will forgive it, Virginia—will you not? She must have been extremely displeased before she would make such a speech. Perhaps, also, you yourself were warm; I know she is easily provoked.”

“No matter,” replied Virginia, proudly, though at the same instant her throbbing heart denied the affected indifference; “it is of no consequence, Reuben. A little more experience will make me wise; and a few more such lessons will not only teach me to know myself, but to appreciate justly the professions of the world. The face of things is changed since my first introduction to your family. It was then believed that I should either become the heiress of Mrs. Meredith, or inherit from my father a handsome independence. Virginia, and lady Virginia Sedley, are two distinct beings, and seem to excite also distinct feelings. Your own words, Reuben, are but too applicable to my situation.”

“Heavens, Virginia!” said he, looking intently and anxiously in her tearful eyes, “do not apply them to any of my family, but least of all to myself. I have known you from a little girl—have been accustomed to consider you as the selected friend

friend of my sisters—to look upon you as one of them—to love you as such; and can you attribute to me feelings so base and despicable?”

“No, Reuben—no, not to you!” replied Virginia, in a voice scarcely audible; “not for an instant could I couple with your name an unworthy sentiment; but it is vain to deny that the chain which linked us together in the sweetest amity is nearly broken—the charm is dissolved which blinded the eyes of a part of your family—my poverty has robbed me of my imaginary attractions, and brought to light only my failings—the heart of Marian still remains unchanged, but she must yield to domestic importunities—your mother no longer loves me, and those of her children who dare to dispute her commands, or differ from her opinion, will become, like me, the object of her hate—the heart of my Marian, I know, will be the *last* to relinquish its chosen friend, while mine may break at our separation; but it shall

never betray, even to her whom I love dearer than life, its real feelings."

"Virginia," cried Mrs. Meredith, who, with Herbert and Winifred, were a considerable distance before them—"Virginia, you will take cold if you walk so slowly."

Virginia quickened her pace.

"A moment only," said Reuben, earnestly; "only a moment. In a few days my mother will be down—I may not again have an opportunity of speaking to you. Virginia, you know how dearly I love my mother—my sisters—you know the unlimited power I have suffered them to acquire over me—you know also that I should be miserable under her displeasure, and unhappy if condemned by my sisters; yet still, Virginia, be just to me. Were I my own master, I would not repress my sentiments. Promise me, that should you ever stand in need of assistance or advice, or any thing that I have the power to bestow, you will remember that I am your brother still—that I have  
the

the first claim upon your confidence. Promise that you will not withhold from me *that* at least—more it would be criminal in me to ask.—You are not angry with me, Virginia?”

“Angry with *you*! oh no—I can never, Reuben, be angry with *you*,” said Virginia, turning from him her face, wet with tears of humbled pride and blighted affection. “I have a brother, Reuben, who may be inclined to receive me as a sister, and to become my natural protector. I may not always be the thing I now am. I may—but, no matter what I may be, I shall never forget that you are my adopted BROTHER.”

More she could not say—her heart was too full, and she feared lest she should betray the extent of an attachment which had grown with her growth, but which it was now her duty to repress.

Reuben pressed with tenderness the soft hand of Virginia. His situation at that moment was far from enviable. In the

hours of happy and innocent childhood, he had often kissed the fair and glowing cheek of her whom he had been taught to regard as the future partner of his life. In pressing his lips to those of Virginia, his heart felt not the throb of passion. He loved her, because she was the idol of his family—he thought her beautiful, because he eternally heard that she was so; but now that she was fortuneless, dependant upon the charity of a brother, whose soul might be as cold and unfeeling as that of his father—now that she was no longer the *dearest* friend of his sisters—the adopted daughter of his mother, Reuben felt an interest in her fate, an anxiety for her happiness, to which, in her prosperous days, he had been a stranger. Had he now been commanded to make choice of a wife, he would have claimed the hand of Virginia in preference to that of any other woman; but feeling conscious of the change which had taken place in the intentions and opinions of his mother, he

he had too much honour to breathe even a hint of an affection which her misfortunes had strengthened and increased.

Virginia was again called by Mrs. Meredith. Again she quickened her pace, and joined them at the door of the cottage. The young men were invited to supper; but Reuben felt that he could not immediately recall his mirthful spirits, and therefore excused himself; while Virginia, pale and unhappy, smarting under the unkindness of those she loved, complained of a headache, and retired to her chamber. Winifred soon followed her friend, and learnt the painful subject of her private discourse with Reuben.

Pride, for that night, was banished from the bosom of Virginia. She thought only of the happy days she had once passed with the beloved family of Reuben; she felt convinced that she must give up all claim to his hand; and that conviction seemed to render him more dear to her. She wept bitterly on the neck of the sympathizing



pathizing Winifred, who would fain have counselled her to hope; but Virginia knew that to hope would be vain. When once Mrs. Glendore took a dislike, it was an eternal one. Even Reuben had acknowledged that the displeasure of his mother would render him miserable. That confession annihilated every hope of Virginia. She was too generous, too noble, to form a wish that could interfere with the peace and tranquillity of Reuben Glendore.

“No, Winifred,” said she, wiping away her tears, “I have no longer any hope; the foolish trial of my power, which I so vainly made at the dance, must have lessened me in the estimation of Reuben. He is authorised to give up a woman who could act so weakly; and were he not, my affection for him is too sincere to allow him to hazard the enmity of his mother on my account.”

Winifred was too firmly attached to Virginia to agree with her on this point; she, however, forbore to differ from her in  
 opinion,

opinion, well knowing how impatient she was of contradiction; she therefore delayed giving utterance to her sentiments on the conduct of the Glendore family, until a more favourable moment, when Virginia's self might, from still further experience, be inclined to adopt her ideas.

## CHAPTER VII.



AT length the ringing of the village-bells proclaimed the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Glendore—"They are come," exclaimed Virginia, with a sickening dread of unknown evil, "and with them that paragon of perfection, Miss Herbert—she who has supplanted me in the affection of my childhood's earliest friends."

"I long to see her," replied Winifred, "though I have already made up my mind to dislike her."

"Nay,

“Nay, that would be unjust, my dear Winifred; and should she prove at all like her brother, you would find it difficult even to treat her with indifference.”

“I am glad, Virginia, that your idea of him is so favourable—it is mutual. I have paid great attention to the looks of Mr. Herbert, and have read in them a language which would flatter the vanity of any woman.”

“Indeed, Winifred! have a care, my friend, how you study the looks of one so young and handsome as Mr. Herbert.”

Winifred blushed, and felt glad to hear the sound of her aunt’s footsteps.

“Come, my children,” said the old lady, “will you not go with me, after dinner, to welcome the return of your friends?”

Virginia would have excused herself, on the plea of indisposition, but was deterred by an unwillingness to testify any feelings of resentment towards Mrs. Glendore, unless her conduct should again call them forth.

She

She therefore prepared to accompany Winifred and her aunt to Meredith House.

Virginia had not seen Reuben since their moonlight walk and felt embarrassed at the idea of meeting him once more in the presence of so keen an observer as his mother. She was slowly following her protectress through the hall, when she was met by Mr. Glendore, who, embracing her with all his wonted kindness, said—  
 “I was just coming to fetch you, my dear girl; I want to introduce you to a highly-valued friend of mine.”

He then led her into his study, where Mrs. Herbert was seated.

“Here, my dear madam, I have brought you my little favourite, the lady Virginia Sedley. Now tell me if she is not the image of your niece?”

Mrs. Herbert appeared to suffer considerable agitation. She extended her hand towards Virginia, who sprung forward, and instinctively raised it to her lips—  
 “Your ladyship must excuse my present emotion,”

emotion," faintly murmured Mrs. Herbert, "as it proceeds from your striking resemblance to a beloved relative. Mr. Glendore had prepared me against being too much surprised; but my nerves are weak, and I feel nearly overcome."

Mr. Glendore would have supported her, but Virginia in an instant rested the head of Mrs. Herbert on her bosom, and besought him to fetch a glass of water.

They were alone—Mrs. Herbert opened her eyes—she turned them on Virginia's expressive face. Gently pressing her to her heart, she kissed her cheek—"Sweet girl," said she, "I thank you for your attentive kindness to a stranger. I am better now."

"Oh, lean on me still, dear madam!" replied Virginia; "you know not the happiness I feel in being able to render you any assistance."

Mr. Glendore returned; Virginia received the water, and presented it to the lovely invalid, who cast a look on her  
good-

good-natured friend which he well understood.

“ I have not deceived you,” said he, smilingly. “ You will find, upon a further intimacy with my little favourite, that she fully answers the description which I gave of her.—Virginia, you have often been the subject of my praise, because I felt conscious that you would not disgrace it.—But come, my dear madam, are you sufficiently recovered to go with us to the drawing-room?”

“ I will follow you, my friend, in a few minutes,” replied Mrs. Herbert.

Mr. Glendore then taking the hand of Virginia, conducted her to the apartment where his family and their guests were assembled.

The sight of Mrs. Herbert had created in the mind of Virginia the most delightful ideas. The expression of her countenance, pale yet beautiful—tender, though full of anguish, seemed to promise to our sanguine heroine the protecting kindness  
of

of a steady friend. Always guided by the impulse of first impressions, Virginia felt that Mrs. Herbert would become more and more dear to her from every interview, while the same quickness of decision made her form a far different opinion of her daughter-in-law.

Mr. Glendore, anxious to procure for her the esteem of Dorinda, had endeavoured to ensure it, by bestowing on her the warmest commendations before their introduction. This had occasioned Miss Herbert to inquire more fully of Alicia concerning the favourite of her father.

The replies of Alicia were guarded, yet she gathered from them sufficient to alarm one who had already devoted her heart to Reuben Glendore. At length the dreaded fair one met her impatient sight, and Dorinda's scrutinizing eyes eagerly ran over her form and features, to trace out faults, which, however, she could not discover.

The sable hue of her crape dress, through which the snowy bosom and the fine-turned

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ed arm were partly visible, only served as a contrast to the delicacy of her complexion, while the crimson on her cheek grew deeper, on feeling that she was the object of general attention. The redundant ringlets of her glossy hair were merely restrained by a comb from falling over her beautifully-turned shoulders; she wore no ornaments, not even a flower in her bosom. Simple in her attire, easy and graceful in her motions, lovely and captivating in her person, Virginia, even to the jaundiced eyes of Dorinda, appeared an object formed to excite the affection of the men, and the envy of the women. The hand of Virginia was placed by Mr. Glendore in that of Miss Herbert. The coldness of its pressure—the criticising look—the forced attempt at friendliness, was but too obvious; and Virginia felt that to love the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Herbert was next to an impossibility.

Turning from Dorinda, she met the eyes of Arthur, who, though seated by Alicia,



Alicia, evidently seemed to watch with solicitude the impression her first appearance would make on his sister. How different was the expression of his handsome features, irradiated as they were by the kindest feelings! He rose, and obliged her to take his place; then inquiring if she had seen his mother, he hastened to learn her opinion of one for whose welfare he was tenderly solicitous.

Alicia immediately questioned Virginia as to her sentiments of Mr. Herbert. The tone of her voice, the restlessness of her looks, betrayed a more than common interest in her reply. She seemed satisfied; and bestowing on her once-loved friend a smile of former affection, entered into conversation with her upon the subject of her brother's long-delayed visit. She appeared to feel so sincerely what must be the painful suspense of Virginia, and to enter so minutely into her situation, that Virginia, lulled by this semblance of kindness, forgot that Alicia had ever acted otherwise.

Her

Her spirits rose in proportion to her new-born hopes of returning love; and by the time that Herbert entered with his mother, she had become animated and happy, notwithstanding that she perceived Reuben still continued by the side of Miss Herbert, who occasionally cast towards her the cold, repulsive glances of inquiring fear.

Juliana also smiled upon her; even Mrs. Glendore addressed her with good-nature, for she was in one of her happiest moods; and the presence of Mrs. Herbert, whose tender, expressive eyes were rivetted on her, made the buoyant heart of Virginia throb with all its wonted felicities.

By degrees Dorinda cast aside her reserve; Reuben remained near her, and Virginia appeared not to court his notice. It was not her beauty, though of the most fascinating order, that was capable of exciting the envy of Miss Herbert; neither would she have been jealous of her various accomplishments; it was *only* in the  
light

light of a *rival* that Dorinda thought her formidable.

Marian, the affectionate-hearted Marian, felt a generous pleasure at beholding the friend of her bosom shine to the utmost advantage. She selected for her those airs which were best adapted to show the rich harmony of her voice, accompanied her in several, and scarce quitted her side for the evening, endeavouring, by her pointed attentions, to make her less observant of the conduct of Reuben. The love of Marian was the pride of Virginia. It was the consoling balm that healed all her wounds—it was the sovereign remedy for every ill; and while she possessed that, she felt the impossibility of being wholly wretched.

Mrs. Meredith was also in high spirits. She had conversed with Mrs. Herbert the best part of the evening, and had received from her an invitation to call on her the next morning to look over some Indian curiosities—an invitation which she failed  
not

not to accept, hoping to turn it to some future advantage. The next morning she therefore went alone, that she might enjoy more freely the conversation of Mrs. Herbert.

She found her, as she had hoped, unattended; and as she was herself possessed of the most pleasant amenity of manners, she soon entered into a friendly and unreserved conversation on the subject most interesting to the mind of Mrs. Herbert—the situation of Virginia. The mute attention of her hearer, the varying expression of whose countenance betrayed the importance which she attached to the narration, made Mrs. Meredith conclude that, could she but secure to her young charge the friendship of one so wealthy as Mrs. Herbert, it might be attended with the most solid advantages to her future establishment in life. Acting on this idea, she confided to her all that she had before repeated to Mr. Glendore, even to  
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the letter herself had written to the young lord de Morville, and his answer.

The sympathy shown by Mrs. Herbert for the early misfortunes of one so lovely was considered by Mrs. Meredith as a favourable omen. She, however, requested that her communication might be kept secret, to which Mrs. Herbert readily assented.

The curiosities were next examined. Some of them in particular pleased the fancy of Mrs. Meredith, who was agreeably surprised, in the course of the day, by a note from Mrs. Herbert, begging her to accept of those articles which she seemed to admire most, and also to entreat that, as her health was too delicate for much exertion, she would have the goodness to become her almoner, and distribute for her what was needful among the sons and daughters of adversity.

Nothing could possibly be more gratifying to the self-love of Mrs. Meredith than

than this proposal. It enabled her, at the same time, to increase her own fame for charity, and to oblige the woman to whom, of all others, it was her wish to become useful. Virginia was equally delighted with this proof of friendliness from Mrs. Herbert; while Winifred, in the plenitude of her affection for Virginia, could not refrain from exulting at what would be fresh mortification to the mercenary Mrs. Glendore.

Cards of invitation were now sent to all the neighbouring families to a ball and supper, given by Mrs. Glendore in honour of her guests. All the taste and fancy of Alicia and her sisters were exerted to make it splendid without a great expence: They meant to appear in the rich dresses given to them by Mrs. Herbert, with their Eastern ornaments, and to attire themselves, as much as possible, in the costume of the East.

Mrs. Glendore had already engaged her son to be the chief partner of Miss Her-

bert for the night; but Alicia vainly threw out her lures to secure the hand of Arthur; he purposely seemed ignorant of her meaning, reserving to himself the right of selecting whom he pleased. From the discourse of his mother he plainly perceived that she was more than commonly interested in the fate of Virginia. She seemed to love to converse with him upon her beauties, and evidently took satisfaction at discovering that the same subject occupied both their thoughts.

Thus encouraged by the *first* object of Arthur's fondest affections, was it to be wondered if he gave full scope to feelings, the warmth of which were only restrained from public eyes by the singular mystery of his father's letter and dying bequest.

There appeared also as if a second mystery hung over this lovely girl, which, though not as impenetrable as the first, yet promised equally to interfere with the repose of Herbert. He suspected that his friend Glendore was attached to her, that

Marian

Marian and her father favoured his passion, but that the rest of the family were averse from it. The guarded conduct of Reuben, and his attentions, whether forced or voluntary, to Dorinda, sanctioned however those of himself for the lovely orphan, and he resolved to solicit her hand for the ensuing dance.

Possessed of a penetrating and reflective mind, Herbert quickly saw into the characters of those around him. That of Mrs. Glendore he read at first sight, but Alicia promised to perplex and elude his scrutiny, while the flattering notice she bestowed on the most trifling sentence which fell from his lips, the charming willingness with which she anticipated his wishes, naturally made him more lenient towards her foibles, springing, as he could not help supposing they did, from her affection for himself. Juliana he respected and esteemed; while for Marian he both felt and evinced the open and undisguised tenderness of a brother. He took her arm



with the familiarity of a long acquaintance, and sauntering over the grounds of the house, generally terminated their ramble by a short call at the cottage. Their conversations were chiefly upon Virginia; it was a theme most dear to the soul of Marian, and she never seemed so happy as when enjoying with him these morning strolls prescribed for her health, during which time her sisters and Miss Herbert were busily engaged in preparations for the ball.

Mrs. Herbert also seemed to consider the road which led to Meredith cottage as the most agreeable. Sometimes she was accompanied by the good-natured friend of her deceased husband, but chiefly by her son. Thus it frequently happened that Arthur was enabled to behold Virginia twice in the same day, to converse with her, to press her soft, white hand in his, join it with that of his beloved mother, and breathe a prayer for the happiness of both.

To

To Arthur, who felt an interest in the slightest circumstance connected with Virginia, it did not seem singular that a being like Mrs. Herbert, full of sympathy and kindness, should attach herself so deeply to a young and lovely girl, abandoned by her father in his lifetime, and forgotten by him in his last moments. Neither was it a matter of surprise that she should admire the character of her protectress, and find amusement in her society. But to Dorinda the partiality which her mother manifested for the company of Mrs. Meredith appeared an instance of bad taste she had never witnessed in her before, while that which at times betrayed itself in her looks and voice for Virginia, notwithstanding all the caution of Mrs. Herbert to conceal it, was only a fresh proof of what Dorinda could not help thinking romantic folly. From whatever source it originated, it excited, as usual, the dislike of Miss Herbert, whose unhappy disposition made her view with a

jaundiced eye every object likely to divide with her the love of her mother. Conscious of this, Mrs. Herbert tried to repress her feelings as much as possible before Dorinda, well knowing the unfortunate jealousy of her nature, and fearing to call it forth by any semblance of affection for Virginia in her presence, while in that of her brother she gave way to the undisguised sentiments of her mind, and felt delighted that his were in unison with her own.

Virginia was to put on second mourning on the night of the ball, which, to her who had suffered so much vexation from the last, afforded but little prospect of amusement. Mrs. Herbert had presented to her and Winifred some beautiful India muslins, and various other articles of value. Among them were two dresses of black and white lace, the former of which Virginia proposed to wear over a white satin slip, and she was busily engaged one morning in preparing it for the occasion,

when

when Mrs. Herbert and Arthur entered the room in which she and Winifred were sitting; Mrs. Meredith being employed at her usual occupation in the garden.

After a few minutes' conversation, Mrs. Herbert said that she would join Mrs. Meredith. The old lady was in her morning costume—a strange contrast to the simple elegance of her visitor, who, smiling sweetly on the laughable figure before her, said—“I am come, my dear madam, to solicit your advice upon a little business; but first let me ask you if you have made out that list you were so good as to promise me?”

Mrs. Meredith conducted her benevolent acquaintance into a small summer-house, tastefully decorated with the drawings of Virginia and Winifred. The list was ready in Mrs. Meredith's pocketbook, to which was subjoined a short account of the wants of the persons whom the active charity of the old lady had found out, not merely in the village in which she resided,

but in the next town, which was only a distance of four miles.

Mrs. Herbert glanced her eye over the names, and then returned it with a bank-note, which she requested Mrs. Meredith to distribute among the most necessitous, without mentioning from whom the relief was sent. This appeared an odd request to Mrs. Meredith, whose love of a good name was the principal inducement which led her to become the almoner of several wealthy families in the neighbourhood.

It was whispered, perhaps calumniously, among some of the poor cottagers, that Mrs. Meredith did not always bestow the total of what she received; that she sometimes dealt out smaller quantities of wine than was intended for them. Be this however as it may, it is certain that she viewed with satisfaction the liberal donation of Mrs. Herbert, and willingly consented to keep her name a secret.

“And now, my dear madam,” said Mrs. Herbert, “I want to consult with you  
upon

upon the best way of presenting your fair *protégée* with some ornaments which it will give me pleasure to see her wear to-morrow evening; yet I do not wish her to know precisely from whom they come, as Dorinda is already jealous of my preference; and this proof of it, notwithstanding the natural generosity of her own disposition, may increase her dislike to lady Virginia Sedley. It might also add to the extraordinary coldness with which Mrs. Glendore speaks of her, and which, considering the years she has known the sweet girl, occasions me considerable surprise."

"Then let it cease, my dear friend," replied Mrs. Meredith. "Did but my little girl possess a share of what you abound in, Mrs. Glendore would not be in continual dread lest her son Reuben should bestow his hand on my portionless Virginia."

"Are such her fears?" inquired Mrs. Herbert, eagerly; "and do you think that her ladyship is attached to the young man?"

“She has known him from a child,” said Mrs. Meredith, “and been accustomed to look up to him as the companion of her innocent pleasures. His sisters once doted on her; they were nothing without Virginia. I was afraid lest they should spoil her by over-fondness, yet would not check their intercourse, because I saw that it was necessary to the happiness of Virginia. Firmly believing that her father would, in his last moments, make some amends for his unnatural desertion, I always represented my young charge as being in expectation of a good fortune. When this hope was done away, by the will of lord de Morville, a visible change took place in the conduct of Virginia’s early friends. A coldness of look and manner succeeded; but I acquit Mr. Glendore, who is still the same kind-hearted man as ever. The fault originates in the *head* of that family. Mrs. Glendore, who is both master and mistress at home, has changed her intentions, and Reuben, who,

like

like his father, suffers himself to be managed entirely by his mother and sisters, must yield to their inclinations, not to his own."

Mrs. Herbert, for a few minutes, was silent. She seemed to be reflecting deeply on what she had heard; then taking the hand of Mrs. Meredith, she said—"To you, my dear madam, who have so nobly devoted yourself to the bringing up of your lovely charge, I need not apologize for betraying an equal interest in her fate; yet I have, in some degree, a right to exert all my influence in her favour." She paused to recover herself, and then continued—"In early life I knew her parents; her mother and I were but as one being; yet, I beseech you, keep this a secret from her child, lest it should occasion the birth of a very natural curiosity in the mind of lady Virginia, to know more of those who gave her existence—a curiosity which I must not gratify."

"Fear not my prudence," replied the  
old



old lady ; “ I will be as silent as the tomb. Faithfully I kept the secret of lord de Morville, as faithfully will I hold sacred whatever communication you may think fit to honour me with. The present lord de Morville will, I trust, act as a brother ought to do. His estate is not large, but it is sufficient to enable him to provide for the wants of his sister. God forbid that he should be like his father !”

“ God forbid !” exclaimed Mrs. Herbert, with a convulsive shudder. “ Lord de Morville was a man who possessed no single recommendation but a handsome person. The base and cold-blooded desertion of his infant daughter, after the loss of his wife, whom he had deeply injured, proves, more than the power of language, the badness of his heart. But let us dismiss a painful subject, which brings to my remembrance the villany of human nature, and return to one fraught with images of innocence and truth. Will you, my dear madam, take charge of this case, and use  
your

your own discretion in presenting its contents to your adopted daughter? I should feel mortified if the child of the countess de Morville did not appear to equal advantage in her attire as the Miss Glendores."

Mrs. Meredith would have felt the same, but she could not bear to part with that precious metal which would have enabled her to prevent the evil; therefore, had it not been for the liberality of a stranger, Virginia would have been but humbly clad from the coffers of Mrs. Meredith.

During the absence of Mrs. Herbert, Arthur took the opportunity of describing how he had left his sister and the Glendore family employed, in the final arrangements for the ensuing evening. He then inquired of Virginia if she was disengaged, and felt some surprise at hearing that she did not mean to dance.

"You have disappointed me, indeed," said he, with evident chagrin, "for I had intended

intended to solicit the honour of your hand."

"Not dance, Virginia!" exclaimed Winifred, laying down her work; "I hope you are not serious, my dear friend. Every body knows how fond you are of the amusement, and it will seem very singular were you not to partake of it. Do, dearest Virginia, change your mind, if only to please me."

"I will not promise," replied Virginia, thoughtfully.

"But if you should," said Herbert, "will you remember my request? This evening you drink tea at Meredith House; perhaps, when I see you again, you may confirm my hopes."

Mr. Herbert and his mother were no sooner gone than Winifred earnestly besought Virginia to accept the offer of the former. "You have now, my dear friend, a glorious opportunity of piquing the vanity of Alicia. It is evident that all her attentions,

attentions, studied looks, and attitudes, have failed to win the heart of this rich young heir. In spite of her magical glances, he has dared to seek another partner, to prefer the titled beggar to her. Oh Heavens! how mortified this proud girl will be to see you led out by the handsome and wealthy Mr. Herbert—by him for whom she has spread so many nets to secure to herself for life!”

“I do not wish to mortify Alicia,” replied Virginia, sighing deeply; “neither is it in my nature to coquet with the lover of another. I hate coquetry, and only wish to attach to myself one pure heart, on whose fidelity I could firmly rely.”

Virginia at that moment thought of Reuben Glendore. She recollected with bitterness the vain folly of her attempt to try the extent of his affection, and the consequent punishment it had brought on herself. Busy memory officiously retraced each scene of confiding endearments. The innocent game of romps, the chaste  
caress,

caress, the look of approving tenderness, were all remembered by Virginia with feelings of self-reproach, and Winifred saw the tear start into her eyes.

“ I think,” said Virginia, “ that my brother is but tardy in proving his professions of regard. Had I been in his place, and he in mine, I should not have suffered any engagement to interfere with my fraternal duties. Perhaps he has imbibed from my father his unfortunate prejudice ; if so, how miserable my fate ! No longer loved by those who flattered and caressed me, abandoned by him whom I was taught to regard as the future companion of my days—well may it indeed be said that I am a titled beggar, for now I am poor in every thing !”

Winifred could not hear this unmoved. She embraced her friend, and entreated her not to despair of the fraternal kindness of lord de Morville. “ Let us make some allowance, my beloved Virginia,” said she, “ for his lordship’s dilatoriness.

We

We know not the nature of his engagement. It may be one in which his heart is concerned; and you, unfortunately, who ought to be most dear, are a perfect stranger to him. Do not call yourself abandoned by Reuben. If ever he loved you, it is now the time to show it; and if he was merely drawn into the engagement by the fondness of his sisters, you have nothing to regret."

"Do you then doubt his attachment, Winifred, or deem it unnatural that he should love your friend?" inquired Virginia, haughtily.

Winifred feared that she had given offence. "No," said she, tremblingly, "my only doubt is whether he is deserving of your ladyship."

"Her ladyship is not deserving of *him*, Winifred. A better heart, a sweeter disposition, cannot be met with; and yet I should not like to marry a man who, at the age of twenty, feared to speak or move without the consent of his family.

Were

Were he but his own master, the love of Reuben Glendore would be worthy of an empress, and the woman who possesses it uncontrolled by the influence of his mother may deem herself the most fortunate of her sex."

After dinner Mrs. Meredith and her two young companions walked to Meredith House, to take a survey of the decorations, &c. which were for the next night's amusement. Mrs. Herbert had, in the handsomest manner, *prevailed* upon Mrs. Glendore to allow her to defray the expences, to which that lady had *reluctantly* consented. An excellent band was procured from town, with every delicacy for the supper-table and refreshment-rooms; and as the apartments were large, and fitted up with modern elegance, they only wanted the usual decorations to make the *tout-ensemble* splendid and agreeable.

Virginia had not once been consulted in any of the arrangements, yet she good-naturedly praised the whole, except in one instance,

instance, in which she thought some figures might be placed to better advantage.

“ I do not wonder at your objecting to them,” said Alicia, smiling sarcastically, “ since it appears that you knew, by some intuitive feeling, that Miss Herbert fixed them in that situation.”

Virginia's heart swelled with anger. The ready answer trembled on her tongue, but the entrance of Dorinda, who was leaning on the arm of Reuben, followed by her mother and Arthur, kept her silent.

Miss Herbert courtesied coldly to her as she passed on to join Alicia. “ Your brother has been telling me, my dear girl,” said she, still leaning on the arm of Reuben, “ that he is not fond of dancing; but I suppose it was only because he was afraid that I should occupy too much of his attention, as I proposed that we should try which of us would be tired first.”

“ Or, perhaps,” said Mrs. Herbert, “ Mr. Glendore's



Glendore's inclinations, Dorinda, may lead him to devote a part of the evening to an older friend than yourself."

Miss Herbert bit her glove, then drew it off in visible displeasure, and dropped the arm of Reuben. "I should be sorry, mamma, to be a check upon the inclinations of Mr. Glendore, or to interfere with any of his engagements."

"My dear friend," replied Reuben, taking her hand gaily, "you will remember that I requested the honour of your hand for to-morrow night. You must excuse me, therefore, if I say that it was ungenerous of you to put any other construction upon my words than what I really meant."

"Reuben only speaks the truth," said Mrs. Glendore; "I know that he is not so partial to dancing as most young men, but my dear Miss Herbert may be assured that he is perfectly sensible of the favour she has granted him, and that he can have no engagement that would not instantly yield to the desire of pleasing her."

The

The eyes of Dorinda sparkled with delight, those of Virginia were cast on the ground. A tear fell on her burning cheek, but she hastily dashed it off. "They shall not see my weakness," thought she; "they shall not enjoy my vexation." She raised her eyes, and caught a glimpse of the white hand of Dorinda, glittering with various jewels. One finger alone was unoccupied, save by a plain ring of gold, which she herself had given to Reuben in exchange for a similar one, which he had placed on the third finger of her right hand. It was the first time she had seen it on that of Miss Herbert. Pale and sick, she hastily turned her eyes to seek the hand of Glendore. Her ring was gone, but in its place a diamond of great value was visible. Virginia with difficulty continued to breathe: a succession of ideas, at once painful and humiliating, crowded into her mind.

She went towards the window to inhale the fresh air. Arthur followed her, and  
whispering,

whispering, said—"May I flatter myself that your ladyship has altered your mind, and that you will accept me for a partner to-morrow evening?"

Virginia hastily replied in the affirmative, and Herbert bent over to express his thanks. "I am not quite friendless," thought she, "not quite deserted."

Winifred now joined them. "Perhaps," said he, taking her hand familiarly, "it is to your kind persuasions I am indebted for the fortunate change in the determination of your lovely friend."

"No, indeed, Mr. Herbert," cried Winifred, with vivacity; "I rather think that you are solely indebted to yourself."

Arthur's heart throbbed with sudden joy; he cast a look of respectful tenderness on Virginia's changeful face, and pressing her hand in his, drew from it the golden pledge of Reuben's faith, at the same moment slipping on her finger another.

"What have you done?" faintly exclaimed

claimed Virginia, alarmed by the action, yet unwilling to make it public.

“Only exchanged rings,” replied Arthur. “*To-morrow* evening, if you *wish* it, I will return your own.” He then hastily quitted the window.

“What shall I do, my dear Winifred?” said Virginia, almost crying for vexation. “What could induce Mr. Herbert to be guilty of such rudeness? I would not lose that ring for one of twice its value.”

“I hope,” whispered Winifred, “that your ladyship will change your mind a *second* time in favour of Mr. Herbert, who, I am certain, intended no rudeness in exchanging his ring for yours. *To-morrow* evening, if you desire it, you may have Mr. Glendore’s gift back again.”

Virginia’s pale cheek now crimsoned with the flush of anger. She drew on her glove, and taking the arm of Miss Meredith, followed her aunt into the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER VIII.



“WHOSE present is that, Virginia?” inquired Mrs. Meredith, as they sat at breakfast the next morning; “it is a very valuable one, my child; let me examine it. A ruby set round with diamonds! upon my word, a very pretty gift! Who gave it you, my love?”

Virginia felt a little embarrassed; but she, nevertheless, determined to tell the truth. Mr. Herbert, in sport, had purloined her ring, and given his own in return.

“Humph!” cried the old lady; “a valuable exchange truly! My life on’t, Virginia, he will never take it back again: and indeed I do not know why you should now set a value upon the ring of Mr. Glendore, since you can no longer consider it

it as the pledge of his fidelity, or even wear it with any propriety. The fortune of Miss Herbert has more attractions than your portionless beauties. Nay, Virginia, never be so silly as to weep because Reuben Glendore has deserted you, when you have the power of choosing a far handsomer lover, and what is still better, a far wealthier one."

"De—d!" repeated Virginia, wiping away her tears; "that is an unpleasant word, my dear madam—I hope you will not make use of it again."

"So it is, my dear girl. When I was a young woman, I had as great an aversion to it as yourself. I was foolish enough to fix my heart upon a youth who lived in my native town, and who told me that I was dearer to him than all the world; but I had no fortune, and he had his to make. He went to London, forgot me, and in less than twelve months married his master's daughter, with a settlement

of four hundred a-year. I could not but own that he had deserted me. The word was odious to my ears; therefore I followed his example, and gave my hand to Mr. Meredith, who early taught me the value of money, and the folly of marrying without it. I was no longer deserted, and I soon became happy. It may not be amiss, Virginia, for you to think of what I have just said, while I go and look over my poultry. If either of you want any thing from the town, Ben is going there to carry the eggs and butter to market. Whatever you do, Virginia, pray don't be so silly as to *force* back the ring upon Mr. Herbert. I am sure he means you to keep it."

"I cannot help thinking, in this instance, the same as my aunt," said Winifred, as soon as they were alone. "If you will not be angry with me, Virginia, I should like to tell you how I would act, if I were you."

"Let

“ Let me hear,” replied Virginia, smiling on her affectionate friend. “ I will not be angry with you.”

“ Well, then, I should not be sorry to show Mrs. Glendore and her family, that, however they might shrink from an alliance with me, now that I was fortuneless, it was as much a matter of indifference to me as to them, and that the desertion of Reuben had only made way for an admirer of greater consequence.”

“ And do *you*, Winifred, join with your aunt to remind me of my humiliation? Am I still to have that hateful word ringing in my ears? If the heart of Reuben is capable of deserting the friend of his boyhood—if it can so readily renounce all hopes of becoming mine, I envy not the conquest of Miss Herbert. Yet how often have I heard him say that he never wished his fortune to flow from his wife—that affection alone should guide him in the choice of a bride! He may still be faithful to his first love—still look forward to



another change in the wishes of his family."

"Oh my sweet friend!" exclaimed Winifred, mournfully, "and do you, indeed, allow yourself to be thus deceived? In what case, except in the present, have I ever differed from you in opinion? But in this we cannot think alike. I view with open eyes the conduct of the Glendores, while you are blinded by the tenderness of your feelings. I see with indignation the cold, averted glance of Mrs. Glendore, the angry, scrutinizing looks of Alicia, the watchful ones of Juliana, and the changeful ones of him whose heart I believe to be at variance with what he conceives to be his duty; again I feel incensed at the pointed manner in which, before you, they seek to draw your attention to the passion of Miss Herbert for Reuben, and to impress you with an idea that he is likely to return it, while you seem to be threatened with their eternal enmity, should you by chance either walk  
or

or converse with Mr. Herbert. Why slumbers now that proud spirit of yours, my Virginia, which was wont to show itself at even the shadow of an insult? Has not Mr. Glendore bestowed your ring upon Miss Herbert? and will you ever call back his own from her brother, or will you fear to listen to the music of his voice, because it will offend Alicia?"

"No, no," replied Virginia hastily, while the blush of anger tinged her face; "I will do neither, Winifred. To-night you shall not have to accuse me of the tameness of my conduct; to-night I will prove to Alicia that the trodden worm can turn on its oppressor. Oh that my brother were but here to encourage me by his countenance and protection! for well I know that the Glendores think his professions are unmeaning, and that his promised visit is already forgotten."

A female servant now entered, with a small covered basket, which she said a man on horseback had left for lady Virginia

Sedley. He was a stranger to her; she had never seen him before. The basket contained two bouquets of choice and beautiful hot-house flowers. Each was labelled; the one for Virginia was evidently selected and arranged by no common hand, yet it only differed from Winifred's in the placing of the flowers. As it was late in the season, they must have been procured at some expence, and the curiosity of the friends was excited to find out to whose gallantry they were indebted for so agreeable and welcome a present.

"They came not from Meredith House," said Winifred, "for their hot-house does not produce any of these flowers." Had sir James Lambton been at home, I should have suspected him of doing us this kindness. As it is, I am at a loss to guess from whom they came. I know of no seat in our neighbourhood that can boast of plants like these."

"Perhaps they are sent by his sister," replied Virginia. "We shall, however, in  
all

all probability find out the donor this evening."

The penuriousness of Mrs. Meredith had not abated, from the circumstance of her discovering to her young charge her real situation. She considered that it was still an uncertainty what part lord de Morville might choose to take in the future establishment of his sister, and therefore wisely determined not to incur any fresh expence, merely because the title of lady was added to her name. The sable hue of her attire did not admit of much extravagance, and she resolved to restrict her in her dress when it was no longer necessary to appear in mourning.

Had it not been for hazarding the good opinion of Mrs. Herbert, she had intended that Virginia should remain in black longer than the time allowed, as it would save washing. She, however, desired her to wear it of a morning, and on those days when it was not likely any one would call. From the same motives of economy

she did not conceive it requisite that she should have her own maid. She did not wish her to become helpless and indolent. Winifred and Virginia could continue to dress each other, or, upon any particular occasion, she would lend them her assistance.

Thus early taught the value of money, it was singular that Virginia in secret only regarded it in proportion as it enabled her to relieve the distresses of the unfortunate, or as the means by which she could gratify her own wants. The foresight and worldly prudence of Mrs. Meredith never suffered her to possess more than a few shillings at once, yet these she joyfully bestowed whenever an object of pity met her sight, though the certain consequence of her generosity was a lecture for giving away so much at a time, and the punishment was, to be kept without her weekly allowance.

Virginia had long coveted to have a maid of her own; but Mrs. Meredith positively

sitively refused her. She therefore submitted to her will; resolving, however, to have her wishes gratified the first opportunity, as she had a favourite object in view, to whom she had given her word not to take into her service any other.

Mrs. Meredith had placed on the toilette of Virginia the case given to her by Mrs. Herbert. She was in one of her most pleasant humours, and at those times her conversation was highly entertaining. Under some trivial pretence she followed them into their chamber, and offered to assist them in dressing. Virginia thanked her, but declined her intended kindness—"If, however, my dear madam, you will have the goodness to lend me again your pearls, I shall be obliged to you; perhaps I may be so fortunate as to possess some of my own ere long."

"You will do very well without *my* pearls to-night," said the old lady, significantly; "I mean to lend them to little Winny. Among all the fine beaux assem-

bled at Meredith House, who knows but my niece may meet with her future husband !”

Away went the old lady, highly delighted in her own mind. She shut the door ; but woman’s curiosity would not allow of her leaving it, until she had heard the sentiments of her fair charge on the subject.

“ Indeed, Virginia,” cried Winifred, “ I am vexed at my aunt’s intended kindness. I had much rather that you had had the pearls. I could do very well without them.”

“ I have no wish to deprive you, my dear Winifred, of your aunt’s favours ; but I think she might have offered me some sort of ornament on an occasion like the present. It is sufficiently mortifying not to possess any of my own. What case is this ? is it yours, Winifred ?”

“ No, indeed, Virginia ; it is the first time that I have seen it ; but let us examine the contents. Hey-day ! what is here ?—a complete set of large and beautiful

tiful pearls, with emerald clasps to the necklace and bracelets. Look, Virginia! here is a note; perhaps it will explain every thing."

Virginia, surprised and delighted, yet scarce knowing whether she ought to be so or not, hastily opened the little billet, and read it to the wondering Winifred—

"Titania, queen of the fairies, sends these to the beloved mortal whose happiness shall be her constant study. Unknown, and perhaps unseen, she will watch over her favourite charge. Let no idle curiosity tempt you to pry into the mystery of my fairy favours. Be prudent, secret, and wise. This is not the last time you will hear from

TITANIA."

"This is more strange than the present of the flowers," said Virginia. "It is evident



dent that your aunt knows of this valuable gift, and has placed them here."

"You are right, my dear child," cried Mrs. Meredith, breaking into the room, from her inability to remain silent any longer; "it was I who placed the case on the table. You now see the reason of my refusing your request."

"But, dearest madam, to whom am I indebted for so beautiful a treasure? I long to express to them my gratitude."

"Be attentive to the wishes of Titania, and be happy," replied the old lady, with a smile of importance. "The curiosity of the Glendores will be as keenly excited as your own—attempt not to gratify it. Come, my dear girl, begin to prepare yourself for their scrutiny. Had they a hundred eyes, the sight of you, this evening, would employ them all. I shall soon be ready, and the carriage is to be at the door by half-past nine."

Winifred, as soon as they were alone, gave full scope to her joy, and congratulated

lated her astonished friend upon the easy accomplishment of her wishes, and the richness of the gift. Each ornament was again separately examined by the delighted and wondering girls. Neither of them could imagine from whom the present came. Virginia would have been inclined to think that it was her brother's, had not the name and hand been feminine; but Winifred overruled this objection by saying, that as the donor wished to remain unknown, he might perhaps have styled himself the queen of the fairies, and that the note might be written by a friend.

This supposition gave the sweetest pleasure to Virginia, as it was a proof that in the heart and mind of her brother she yet lived. Full of this enchanting idea, she hastened to cast aside the first garb of mourning for an unnatural father, and to put on, as she fondly hoped, the valuable proofs of a brother's love.

Winifred, to whom the mean passion of envy was unknown, assisted her to  
braid

braid the sunny tresses of her light chestnut hair, and to divide the silken curls so as to show the smooth clear forehead and fine arched eyebrow. On one side she placed a wreath of pearl flowers, and then proceeded to twine round the neck and graceful arms of her friend strings of the finest oriental pearls. To the necklace was attached a star, in the centre of which was a small crystal, containing a lock of hair—"It is my brother's," said Virginia, with enthusiasm, and pressed it to her lips.

Her black lace robe was confined under the swelling bosom by a zone of pearls, in which she placed the odorous present of the morning. Virginia scarce had power to withdraw her eyes from the mirror, in which were reflected, as she imagined, the pledges of her brother's affection. But half-an-hour before she did not think herself possessed of a single valuable, for she could not call the ring of Mr. Herbert her own; but now she saw herself mistress of ornaments

ornaments to the amount of several hundred pounds, and with a prospect of still further favours from the same hand.

“ Ah, now you will do very well, Virginia,” cried Mrs. Meredith, exultingly; “ very well indeed! I don’t know that I ever beheld larger or finer pearls than those. They would cost a pretty penny if you had to buy them at a jeweller’s.—Here, Winny! here are mine; you shall wear them to-night, my child, for good luck. They were what I wore on my wedding-day, and were given to me by Mr. Meredith.—Come, girls, let us be gone.—Be sure, Virginia, not to insist upon Mr. Herbert’s taking back his ring; it sparkles so prettily, and sets off the whiteness of your hand.—Jonathan, you can put up the carriage at Mr. Glendore’s, and you and Ben can make yourselves useful. You have not had your supper yet—have you?”

Jonathan replied in the negative.

“ That’s well. Then you can sup there.

Mind

Mind that you take good care of the horses, and give them plenty of food."

Jonathan most willingly promised to obey his mistress, not a little pleased at the certainty of enjoying, for that night, some of the good things of this world.

As they entered Meredith House, Virginia could not help noticing to Wini-fred its altered appearance. In the hall, which was handsomely lighted up, they were received by the servant of Mr. Glendore, who gave their names to three others belonging to Mrs. Herbert, in splendid liveries, while a fourth ushered them into the ball-room, which was tastefully decorated with coloured lamps and wreaths of various flowers, emitting a grateful and pleasing odour. Herbert had been on the watch ever since the company had assembled; he immediately joined them, and taking the hand of Virginia, conducted her to where Mrs. Glendore and her two eldest daughters were seated.

The

The dancing had commenced, and Alicia's countenance expressed the mingled sensations of disappointment and anger, as she saw for whom he had been thus anxiously waiting—for whom herself had been rejected. She scarcely deigned to notice the kind inquiry of Virginia, while the eyes of her mother, sparkling with rage, seemed fixed on the valuable ornaments by which she was adorned. They could not belong to Mrs. Meredith, for those were worn by Winifred, and were of an inferior size—how then could Virginia have obtained them? She whispered to Alicia, who, darting a look full of resentment at her once-loved friend, said—“Upon my word, Virginia, I did not think that Mrs. Meredith had such a fine assortment of pearls. These are very beautiful, and become you extremely. I have never seen you dressed with so much *studied* elegance as to-night, in compliment, I suppose, to Mr. Herbert.”

“I am glad you think so,” cried Winifred,

fred, hastily, "for I was her ladyship's tire-woman. All the merit of having *studied* to make her look well is, therefore, mine; though I believe few people that know any thing of lady Virginia Sedley will think it necessary for her to *study* to look well."

"No flattery, Winifred," said Virginia; "you know that I have learned to detest flatterers."

"Yet you will, most likely, meet with many to-night," remarked Mrs. Glendore; "Mr. Herbert, for instance, can flatter as delicately as any one."

"Pardon me," rejoined Arthur; "I only flatter those whose understandings are weak enough to require such stimulus." He then led his partner to the set which was forming, and Alicia felt sick with vexation at thus witnessing the preference given to Virginia by the man who, of all others, she most wished to attach solely to herself. The demon of jealousy took possession of her soul, as she watched the graceful movements

ments of Virginia, and saw admiration of them depicted on the handsome countenance of her companion—"She has dared," thought Alicia, "to thwart my plans a second time—a second time has she robbed me of my partner. I will not dance to-night; but dearly shall Virginia rue her daring imprudence. In detaching her from my brother I have vitally wounded myself."

The resolution of Alicia not to dance was soon made known. It required not this to increase the displeasure of Juliana, or the hatred of Mrs. Glendore; while Reuben, to whom the latter had complained bitterly of the unfriendly conduct of Virginia, only sighed to behold what he deemed a fresh instance of her levity and want of thought.

At the conclusion of the dance Arthur conducted his lovely partner to a couch, on which his mother was reposing. Dorinda sat next her, and Reuben stood opposite.



posite. Exercise had deepened the colour on the fair cheek of Virginia, and added to the native brilliancy of her fine hazel eyes. Mrs. Herbert pressed her hand; she longed to express her real sentiments, but the presence of Dorinda was a restraint to her. She beheld, however, with satisfaction, that her fairy favours had been accepted; while Reuben, still conversing with Miss Herbert, could not prevent his eyes from wandering, or his heart from throbbing at the well-known sound of a voice dear to him from childhood. Neither could he avoid contrasting, with the inferior charms of Dorinda, the beautiful harmony of Virginia's Grecian features, the magic witchery which seemed to lurk beneath the long and silken eyelash, or the graceful symmetry of a form beautifully proportioned, yet shaded modestly from the gaze of public observation. Dorinda, sparkling with various jewels, and heiress of an immense fortune, pos-  
sessed

sessed not a quarter of those attractions which Reuben knew were centered in the portionless Virginia.

Not only the pearls, but the flowers in her bosom, became the next subject of notice and of envy to Alicia. Even Dorinda admired the latter, and carelessly inquired where she had procured them?

"They were sent as a present, this morning, to Winifred and myself," said Virginia. "We know not the giver; but the gift was a very acceptable one to us."

"No doubt," replied Alicia, scornfully. "The flowers must have been procured from London. Perhaps sir James Lambton may be there; and hearing of our ball from his sister, has taken this opportunity of showing his gallantry."

This speech was meant for the ear of Arthur, who immediately fixed his eyes inquiringly on the blushing face of Virginia—"In that case," she replied, "I should have expected, Alicia, that the present would have been sent to *you*. However,

ever,

ever, as it is a joint concern, Winifred and I shall not quarrel about which of us has the most right to take the compliment to herself."

"Oh, you of course!" cried Winifred, gaily. "The flowers of your bouquet are evidently arranged by the hand of a lover; but if your ladyship is too indolent, or too careless, to discover who he is, only ask Alicia's assistance; her good-nature will, I am certain, induce her to set about the affair immediately."

Alicia bit her lips; but it was not by open warfare that she meant to wound the heart of her early friend; checking, therefore, the angry frown and the half-uttered reply, she said, in a softened tone, which stole like sweet music on the ear of Virginia—"My assistance in this case is needless. Should the donor of these odoriferous flowers be present to-night, the beauty of Virginia will soon cause him to betray his secret."

Virginia, scarce believing what she heard,  
hastily

hastily raised her downcast eyes, and meeting those of Herbert, whose cheek wore a deeper crimson than her own, she felt an immediate consciousness that he was the giver.

Mrs. Herbert had quitted her seat to speak to Mrs. Meredith. She now returned, accompanied by Marian, to whom she was more strongly attached than to either of her sisters—"If you do not join in the present dance, lady Virginia," said she, "will you walk with me and your friend through the rooms?"

Virginia joyfully relinquished her place to Arthur; and giving her arm to his mother, felt happy at the opportunity of enjoying, at one and the same time, the society of two beings whom she so dearly loved.

The absence of Virginia and of Winifred, who had been called on by her partner, enabled Juliana and Alicia to comment unrestrained upon the person and manners of the former. Herbert had asked

ed Alicia to dance, but she declined, and it was an exercise of which Miss Glendore never partook. Dorinda, unwilling to lose sight of Reuben, chose to sit down occasionally, rather than see him pay those attentions to another which she wished exclusively her own. He remained near her, and she had therefore no inclination to waste a thought on her who had once been regarded as his destined bride.

In reply to the friendly laments of Alicia, who, in the most eloquent terms, deplored the natural thoughtlessness of her *beloved* friend, Arthur found an excuse in her youth and beauty—"She is too inexperienced," said he, "to know the necessity of veiling from the world her exuberance of spirit. Innocent, and free from guile, she expects not to find it in those who wear the semblance of a kindred purity.—What say you, Glendore? you have known her ladyship from a child—do you see in her any thing that can call forth the breath of censure?"

Reuben

Reuben was much disconcerted—"Faith, Herbert, you have applied to a very superficial observer. Virginia is a pretty girl, whom my sisters have done their best to spoil by over-fondness and over-praise. They now make a sad lamentation about her being vain and giddy, and I know not what. Women are always inclined to spy out faults in each other, which is a most unamiable propensity.—Is it not, Miss Herbert?"

"Nay," said she, laughing, "you must not expect that I should join you in the reproach against my own sex, especially as I have too high an opinion of the discernment of your sisters, not to believe that they are better judges in this affair than yourself. But, to tell the truth, I suspect that the person who gave this magic circle," holding up her right hand, and displaying the plain gold ring, "was no other than lady Virginia, the pretty girl who, you say, your sisters have tried to spoil by over-indulgence. And has not

the brother done his best to second their endeavours ?”

“No, indeed,” replied Glendore, more and more confused. “As the bosom-friend of my sisters, I esteemed her too highly to vitiate her mind by unmeaning nonsense. Give me back that ring, Dorinda ; it is too insignificant a return for yours.”

“I mean to keep it, notwithstanding.”

“By all means, if you wish it,” said Alicia. “It can only be valuable in the eyes of my brother by having been worn by you.”

“A prettier compliment could not have been paid you, my sister,” said Herbert. “Glendore is a lucky fellow to have such a timely auxiliary.” Saying this, he quitted them, to seek, in another chamber, his mother and her fair companions.

Alicia, under pretence of assisting Mrs. Glendore, rose also ; but, in fact, more from a restless curiosity to watch the movements of Herbert, who, she feared, was already enslaved by the charms of her portionless

tionless friend. Meeting with Winifred, she assumed one of her kindest looks—praised her for the graceful skill she had just displayed; then, by degrees, reverted to the attractive appearance of Virginia; and, lastly, mentioned the mysterious pearls, which, Winifred assured her, did not belong to her aunt, but to Virginia herself.

Still more surprised and perplexed, Alicia made an excuse for leaving her, and hastened to disclose to her mother what she had just heard.

The band now began a favourite dance of Virginia's. Marian had left Mrs. Herbert, who, still leaning on the arm of Virginia, beckoned to her son, as she saw him earnestly looking for her amidst the crowd—"My Arthur," said she, in a sweet, impressive voice, at the same time giving him the hand of her companion, "may the happiness I now feel in seeing you lead out my dear little friend be increased by my living to witness a still further friendship."



friendship between you and her family! you cannot oblige your mother more than by studying to secure the esteem of lady Virginia 'Sedley."

"Thus encouraged," replied Arthur, as he passed onward, "by the wishes of Mrs. Herbert, and still more so by those of my own heart, what further stimulus can I require to induce me to attempt so delightful a task?—what, but a smile of approbation from lady Virginia herself?"

"The wishes of Mrs. Herbert are already granted," said Virginia. "The first moment I beheld her my heart sprang towards her, as if to the bosom of a long-estranged friend; all that belong to her must be esteemed by me."

"I am satisfied for the present," replied Arthur; "my acquaintance with your ladyship has been too short for me to presume upon any thing more than what your regard for my inestimable mother may lead you to bestow upon her son."

They had loitered, and therefore were obliged

obliged to stand at the bottom of the set—  
 “Tell me, however, dear lady Virginia,” he continued, gently pressing her hand, and looking tenderly in her face, “tell me, however, that you do not wish me to return the ring which I had the temerity to draw from your finger last night. I only wish to be convinced that it is of no importance to you.”

Virginia turned her eyes to where Reuben stood in conversation with Dorinda—he had just taken the rose which she had worn in her bosom, and raising it gallantly to his lips, placed it in his own—“No, no,” said Virginia, hastily; “the ring is of no importance in my eyes; if I had it, I should destroy it. But indeed you must allow me to give back yours—it is too valuable for me to retain.”

“Not for the world would I receive it back—I gave it in exchange for this. If not for my sake, at least wear it for my mother’s, to whom it once belonged. She gave it me not long since, with a request  
 that

that I would bestow it on her who, in my opinion, should best deserve it—I have only obeyed her desire.”

“ You flatter me now ; indeed you do,” replied Virginia ; “ I cannot keep the ring—pray let me return it.”

“ I pledge to you my honour that my mother shall second my entreaties,” said Herbert, earnestly. “ At her request you will surely retain what I hope your delicacy alone compels you to decline.”

Virginia timidly raised her eyes to the face of Arthur—the most respectful tenderness beamed in his, while each handsome feature was expressive of the love he felt for the sacred bequest of his father. Again he pressed her to accept the ring—“ Think,” said he, “ that it is the offering of a brother’s love, and as such receive it.”

“ I must first hear what Mrs. Herbert says,” replied Virginia, “ before I can give my consent.”

Arthur seemed this evening to have thrown off the reserve which had hitherto controlled

controlled his actions. The mysterious hints which the letter of his father contained were forgotten—he saw only the lovely ORIGINAL OF THE MINIATURE—he believed her free to listen to the tender sentiments she had excited. Why, then, should he seek to conceal them, or to veil from the world what he should glory in making public? For this night, at least, the heart of Arthur was exempt from those torturing suspicions which at a future time destroyed his peace. For this night he felt unalloyed all the ecstasies of love and hope; and what his tongue refused to utter, his bright blue eyes most eloquently betrayed.

Mrs. Herbert so warmly seconded the prayer of her son, that Virginia was obliged, though reluctantly, to assent to their united wishes. They passed on to the refreshment-room, where Arthur prevailed on Virginia to take a glass of Champagne. Reuben Glendore had just procured one for Dorinda. His eye caught the sparkling

ling ruby which glittered on the white hand of lady Virginia—where was his simple gift?—it was gone! Virginia's finger no longer graced the golden fetter! Ah, Reuben! what at that moment crossed thy mind?—was it love, or was it anger, that made the blood recede from thy cheek—that called the deep sigh from thy bosom—that made thee start back with sickening fear, and join Dorinda?

At the same moment a servant gave a note into the hand of Virginia—it came from her brother, and merely announced his arrival at Meredith Cottage.

Virginia scarce breathed—excess of pleasure had nearly overpowered her.

“I hope no bad news, my love?” said Mrs. Herbert; “you seem faint—lean on me.”

Arthur pressed her hand in his.

“Have the goodness to find Mrs. Meredith,” at length she said; “tell her that my brother is at the cottage.”

Herbert flew to obey her wishes, and  
the

the next instant returned with the old lady and Mrs. Glendore, who had heard with astonishment that lord de Morville was actually come at last to pay a visit to his long-estranged sister. She begged of Mrs. Meredith to prevail on his lordship to do her the honour to make one at her supper-table; while the impatience of Virginia would scarce permit of her waiting until the horses were put to the carriage, so eager was she to testify her affection for so dear a relative.

END OF VOL. I.

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